



THE TEN ESSENCES

When Yang Lu Chan changed the frame of Chen style Taiji, it was the beginning of traditional Yang style Taiji. It took three generations of the Yang family and many years of constant refinement to the frame to be what we know today as traditional Yang Style Taiji Chuan, as put together by Yang Cheng Fu. The most important legacy left to us by him is the Ten Essences.

- 1)** In ancient times, when Taiji was created, it wasn't as a stress reduction and relaxation exercise, it was a martial art. Combat was generally done one on one, man to man. Your first clash with your opponent would have been eye contact. How you stood, the way you looked, the appearance that you projected onto your opponent would be all important. If you stand tall with the feeling of uprightness in your body, and the projection of high spirit, your opponent is less likely to make a move towards you. Having the head, neck and spine in an upright position is a sign of good spirit. When the back is hunched, this is a sign of tiredness, distress, low spirit. The head should be upright so that the SHEN (spirit) can reach the head top. Don't use LI (strength) or the neck will be stiff and the Qi and blood cannot flow through. Although upright, be relaxed. If the spirit cannot reach the head top, it cannot be raised.

RAISING YOUR HEAD TO LIFT THE SPIRIT IS THE FIRST ESSENCE.

- 2)** In order to balance the lifting of the head, we must sink the shoulders and lower or round or sink the elbows. The shoulders must be completely relaxed - if not, they will be uptight. Sinking the elbows means to bring the elbows down and round or relax them. If the elbows are raised, the shoulders will not be able to sink and relax. "If the elbows are raised, the shoulders are not able to sink and you cannot discharge people far".

SINKING THE SHOULDERS AND ELBOWS; IS THE SECOND ESSENCE.

- 3) As the shoulders and elbows are lowered, the chest becomes loose and sunk. This, in turn, causes the back to become rounded, and the back muscles expanding and stretching slightly. With the chest depressed naturally inward, the Qi can sink to the dantien. If the shoulders are pulled back and the chest projected, the Qi will get stuck here and the body becomes top heavy. The breath will be restricted to the upper chest. "The heel will be too light and can be uprooted".

LOOSENING OR SINKING THE CHEST AND ROUNDING OR PLUCKING UP THE BACK IS THE THIRD ESSENCE.

- 4) Relax the waist - the waist is the commander of the whole body. In Taiji terms, the waist refers to the whole torso. The power of the body doesn't originate in the arms or the legs, but in the waist. If you can relax your waist, then your legs will have power and strength and you will be firm and stable. It is said that "The source of the postures lies in the waist. If you cannot get power, then seek the defect in the legs and the waist". Issuing energy, or *fa jing*, is achieved through correct use of the waist.

LOOSENING THE MUSCLES TO ALLOW THE TURNING OF THE WAIST IS THE FOURTH ESSENCE.

- 5) Since power is created in the waist, every time the waist is turned, your body weight distribution changes and your balance is affected. The legs are there to support the upper body (**importance of strong legs**). The feeling of strength and firmness in the legs is called rooting. Paying attention to the weight changes in the legs will produce a strong rooting feeling. Obviously, if the weight of the whole body is resting on the right leg, then the right leg is substantial (or full) and the left leg is insubstantial (or empty) and vice versa. We must learn to understand the weight changes in the legs with the turning of the waist, turning lightly and without using strength. Our stance will then be firm; we will be rooted and not thrown easily off balance. Taiji energy is very interesting. It is controlled by your thoughts; the energy is there and ready to be used at your command. If you don't think about it, the energy is not focused. Energy without focus is useless.

BEING ABLE TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN FULL AND EMPTY AND UNDERSTANDING WEIGHT CHANGES IN THE LEGS WITH THE TURNING OF THE WAIST IS THE FIFTH ESSENCE.

- 6) If you understand the first five essences, you will be able to feel that the upper body is governed by the first three and the lower by the fourth and

fifth. The classics say "the motion should be rooted in the feet, released through the legs, controlled by the waist and manifested through the fingers. When the hand, waist and foot moves together, the eyes follow. If one part doesn't follow, then the whole body is disordered. Now we come to the sixth essence –

CONNECTING THE MOVEMENTS OF THE UPPER AND LOWER BODY INTO ONE LARGER ENERGY

7) As the upper and lower energies are combined, the movements must be delivered continuously. This feeling of flowing energy moving smoothly *without interruption in motion* is called continuity - this is the seventh essence. The classics say - "from beginning to end it is continuous and not broken. It is circular and again resumes. It revolves and has no limits."

SEVENTH ESSENCE - CONTINUITY, SMOOTH, UNINTERRUPTED MOTION.

8) In Taiji, each movement within the form has a purpose, or reason, and understanding the reason or the purpose comes from understanding the application. And in order to understand the application, we must understand the mind-body connection of Taiji. We must know the intent - what your mind wants to achieve and what your body is capable of doing. Remember, the main thing in the practice of Taiji is the spirit. The classics say that spirit is the commander and the body is subordinate. The body follows the mind. When you can make the mind and body become one, or learn to co-ordinate the inside and outside, then you will have unified the body and intent:

EIGHTH: THE INTENT AND BODY HAVE TO BE UNIFIED AS ONE.

9) When achieving this, we must remember that applications are executed without force - we use the mind and not the force - no tightness in the muscles. In practicing Taiji, the whole body must relax. Not one part of the body should remain hard or have force in it, not blood vessels, bones, muscles, ligaments. If you can achieve this, then your movements will be agile and you will be able to turn easily and freely. As we all know, the body has meridians, and through these flow the blood and the Qi. Hard, tense areas will block the flow of the Qi and the blood and will cause the body to be off-balance. If the body is relaxed, the blood and the Qi will circulate. If we practice this correctly, we will develop nei jin (real internal force). The classics say "when you are extremely soft, then you become extremely hard and strong". Your bones become hard and strong - arms become like iron wrapped in cotton wool or silk - inside is hard and outside is soft.

USING THE MIND AND NOT FORCE IS THE NINTH ESSENCE.

10) Finally, the tenth essence. Taiji uses stillness to control movement. Although we move, there is also stillness. Therefore, when practicing the form, slower is better. Our breaths become long and deep and we can sink the Qi to the dantien. Our motion should feel peaceful, like standing in a pool of water and when we move, we move so gracefully that we don't cause any ripples or waves. That is seeking stillness in motion. When we stand still, we should still feel the inner body extending and expanding, creating energy. Here we are seeking motion in stillness - together these form the **TENTH ESSENCE.**

STILLNESS IN MOTION AND MOTION IN STILLNESS.

When you can reason out the Ten Essences, your training will reach a new skill level. In the beginning, you may find it difficult, but reasoning the Ten Essences is better than just memorizing the words. Only then will you begin to understand the feeling in your body. Following the feeling, your body will never move outside the correct frame -your form will look just like Yang Chen Fu's photographs, your energy will come up much easier and quicker. Then you will know you are on the right path.



Yang Lu Chan



Yang Chen Fu



Chen Man Ching



Grandmaster Feng-Chao Lin
Closed Door Disciple of Cheng Man-Ch'ing



Shirfu Jeff Lan – Closed Door Disciple
to Grandmaster Feng-Chao Lin

Our lineage as passed down from teacher/student to teacher/student.