

## Refining your form

When we made the 'lock-down' lessons, one of our objectives was to go into detail about how to make each of the moves. There are a few things that it is important to understand.

One of the first things you come across in tai chi is how to stand and distribute your weight. 70/30 is the usual advice to beginners. That is to say you have 70% of your weight on your 'substantial' leg and 30% on the 'insubstantial'\* leg. Herein lies a problem. 70/30 is almost double weighted. It can certainly lead to double weighting. When trying to apply 70/30 it is easy to feel that you have most of your weight on one leg but testing with a partner will often prove you wrong.

I prefer the, perhaps, more extreme 80/20. It means moving your weight more into your substantial leg so taking pressure off of your other leg. The idea is that your '20' weighted leg is not supporting you but is just resting on the ground. I think that the concept is less scary than 100/0, though that is what it amounts to, but 'resting' one leg on the ground takes out a lot of tension.

This is where you need to get another critical factor right. To achieve 80/20 you must get your hips square (OUCH!), lift your head and straighten your back. For the purposes of this I am assuming a front stance but it should work much the same in a back weighted stance.

Now, hips: these can be difficult. The tai chi stance means that one leg is always behind the other at something of an angle. So, naturally your hips are also at an angle. This is particularly problematic if your stance is very upright – something we would call 'crane style'. If you just turn your hips to square them you put tension into your lower back, hence the 'ouch'.

Try this: first of all relax and sink your hips a bit; as you do so, turn from your lower torso, about thigh level and increase the weight in your front leg. If you make this a whole body move, and keep relaxed as you do it, you should find that you square your hips without tension. 'Whole body' means that your shoulders move round in unison. Think of your spine as the fulcrum.

This move will, in effect close your kua which is an energy point at the inguinal joint at the top of your leg. Just make sure that you don't move your knee too far forward, keep it behind the toe.

Practice this and then bring the technique it into your form practice. You will feel the difference. The moves will feel more positive.

The importance of keeping your back upright and your head erect cannot be over emphasised.

Getting tai chi right without someone to try it out with can be difficult. Normally you have your own practice but come to a class to refine it. What we are aiming for is to feel what is going on in your body, inside as well as outside. This is a general aim but is even more important if you are working by yourself. Try doing things wrong, round your back, let your head fall out of alignment, even try a few moves double weighted. Notice how it feels compared to doing the moves correctly.

Don't forget that *all* of the moves in tai chi involve your whole body. Practise will make you more body aware, not just when you are doing your tai chi practice but all of the time.

*\*We describe the weighted leg as 'substantial' and the neutral leg as 'insubstantial'. The basic concept seems pretty simple but this is tai chi so, as usual, there is more to it. What really happens is, as you move it is the whole body that becomes substantial or insubstantial. This is what gives tai chi its effortless power.*