

Chen Taichi Warm-up Exercises: as taught by Chen Youze (CY)

1. Introduction

- a. Stretching in Tai Chi is taken extremely seriously. People want “skills” and want to “get to the good stuff” but inherently, the ones who have the skills and demonstrate the good stuff are highly proficient at whole body, integrated movement.
- b. It is about 50% concentration and 50% stretching.
- c. We are initiating from the ground on every stretch including the wrists. Using the set below as an example, this would give you 153 opportunities to direct the force from the ground (17X9). High repetition is essential to change patterned movement.

2. General Notes

- a. Move in a direction from head-to-toe or toe-to-head
 - i. This ensures that you stretch everybody part and that the stretching is a slow unfolding of the body’s flexibility and strength
 - ii. CY teaches from bottom to top. Many traditions do the reverse. He did not share opinions about stretching from top down but sees all stretching and qi gong as serving the purpose of building “root” and improving posture and stance. It therefore serves that working your way up encourages connection to the ground
- b. Do 9 repetitions of each exercise
 - i. Choose one number so that it is the same for all the exercises so that you can concentrate on the movement and not thinking about the counting
 - ii. It has to be enough repetitions so that you feel a light fatigue from moving the muscle by the time you stop.
- c. No static stretches
 - i. For each exercise we are relaxing a joint and using the muscles on each side of the joint to rotate the joint.
 - ii. We are rotating through the joint several times in continual movement with a slight pause between repetitions.
 - iii. This is theoretically opposite from western methods of locking a joint and pulling the muscle tight and holding.

3. Exercises

- a. Raising On To Toes Into Prayer Hands
 - i. feet ~6 inches apart
 - ii. raise hands out to side, palms up
 - iii. Palms end in prayer hands, overhead, arms extended
 - iv. Rise up onto toes and arch backwards pointing fingertips at back wall
 - v. Lower to heels and bring hands back up overhead
 - vi. Hands separate and decent to the sides palm down

- vii. Hands meet with fingers pointing at floor in prayer hands
 - viii. Bend at the waist until finger tips touch the floor
 - ix. Bend knees and slowly stand
 - x. Release hands to side
- b. Ankle Rotation
- i. Place right toe on ground straight back at about the distance of where the left heel ends
 - ii. Relax ankle
 - iii. Rotate ankle to the outside
 - iv. Repeat on left side, only rotating to the outside
- c. Knee Rotation
- i. The knees are stretched by using the muscles of the calf and hamstring to rotate the knees by lowering yourself in and out of a sitting position. Just like with the ankles, imagine that the knee joints are very loose.
 - ii. Place the palms over the knee caps
 - iii. Relax the lower back
 - iv. Sit as though you were lowering yourself on a chair
 - v. Rotate the knees counter clockwise
 - vi. Sitting and pushing back up with each revolution
 - vii. Repeat in other direction
- d. Groin and Lower Back Stretch
- i. Squat down on your heels, heels remain on the floor
 - ii. Interlace your hands and put them below your chin, not touching your chin
 - iii. Press out on the outsides of your forearms into the inside of your knees
 - iv. Press with the inside of your knees on your forearms until they are parallel
 - v. Do not pick up the rear heel
 - vi. You should feel a stretch across your lower back
- e. Kua (Hip) Opening
- i. Think about your right heel
 - ii. Soften your lower back
 - iii. Imagine you are sitting on a bar stool and instigate raising your left leg until your thigh is parallel with the ground.
 - iv. Rotate your thigh outward and then release the leg back down.
 - v. Each repetition should begin with a soft lower back and a sitting motion.
 - vi. The standing knee is slightly bent, hands at the side
- f. Waist Turns (includes calves)
- i. The waist is stretched by rotating sideways into a posture that resembles a discus thrower
 - ii. Feet are wider than shoulder width apart
 - iii. Hands extend out from the side, palms down
 - iv. Rotate all the way around to the right and look at the back left heel
 - v. Palms remain facing the floor

- vi. Rotate back around to the left and look at the back right heel
- vii. You should feel a stretch across your back and your calf
- g. Shoulder Rotation
 - i. Shoulders are stretched by opening and closing the chest and back. We initiate and end in the feet. Arms are completely relaxed.
 - ii. Think about your heels
 - iii. Relax your back
 - iv. Push up from the heels through your spine and open the chest to rotate the shoulders back.
 - v. Pause at the bottom
 - vi. Continue rotating backwards, always pushing from the heel
 - vii. Repeat in the other direction by pushing up through the back and closing the chest to come around to the front
- h. Elbow Stretch
 - i. The elbow is stretched by bringing both hands up close to the body and then flicking them out and forward
 - ii. Raise hands palm up
 - iii. Bring them in to the breast line against the body
 - iv. Turn your hands over – to the inside - and flick forward
 - v. You should end with the arms extended, palms down
- i. Wrist Stretch
 - i. Interlace fingers, palms together
 - ii. Loosen wrists
 - iii. Rotate wrists quickly making circles
 - iv. This is awkward at first because the wrist does not relax easily.
 - 1. If this is the case start by turning the back of each hand to the floor and then changing to the back of the other hand.
- j. Neck/Head Stretch Forward
 - i. Relax the head down
 - ii. Pause and you will feel a nice stretch down your back
 - iii. Use your back muscles to bring the head up and back
 - iv. Look at the ceiling, mouth open
 - v. You should feel a nice stretch down the front of your neck
 - vi. Contract the chest muscles to initiate moving the head forward again
 - vii. Repeat
- k. Neck/head stretch side-to-side
 - i. Lay your right ear on your right shoulder
 - ii. Stretch through your left finger tips
 - iii. Slowly rotate your left ear to your left shoulder
 - iv. Your hands are at your side and may rise and far ~ 1 inch but not a lot
- l. Whole body
 - i. Stand with arms extended out to the sides palm up

- ii. Curl the right hand over to where the finger tips are on the shoulder
- iii. Move the right hand down so that the back of the hand is by the right armpit
- iv. Raise the left hand high and imagine sticking your fingers into where the wall meets the ceiling
- v. Sit on your left heel while your right hand traces the side seam of your body
- vi. The back of the hand travels along the body as the fingers travel down to the ankle
- vii. Come back up to where your two palms are facing the ceiling with your arms extended out to the side
- viii. Repeat on the other side