

MOVEMENT AWARENESS PRINCIPLES

The principles here are applicable to moving meditation forms like chi kung, tai chi and yoga. Many apply to standing, sitting, and daily activities as well. This information supports the current Mindful Movement Series at Zen Center San Diego, which is on video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCAf0GBmyx4>

For specifics of the movements, see the companion file, “Mindful Movement Series”.

These guidelines move from the feet to the head, for maximum balance and presence.

1. STANCE AND BALANCE: Stand on flat ground if possible, with feet planted firmly on the earth, forming a stable base.
2. FEET: In the basic stance, feet are a shoulder-width apart, with inner edges parallel. (See Movement Series for exceptions in specific movements).
3. KNEES: Unlocked, flexible.
4. LEGS AND LOWER TORSO: Give the body’s weight to the ground, and feel the gravitational pull, rooting the body to the earth.
5. “WEIGHT UNDERSIDE”: Feel the weight on the lower side of the limbs, shoulders, feet and buttocks, to support groundedness.
6. ABDOMEN: (Japanese *hara*, Chinese *dantien*): Feel the breathing in this area, as well as throughout the torso.
7. HEAD AND UPPER TORSO: Sense the upper body gravitating upward, buoyant as if the head contains a helium-filled balloon.
8. TONGUE: The tip of the tongue rests gently on the hard palate, right behind the upper front teeth.
9. EYES: Unfocused and soft, slightly lowered, as if seeing *through* the world, rather than looking specifically at something. The head is an extension of the spine, remaining erect as the eyes are lowered. Take care that head doesn’t fall forward as eyes are lowered.
10. BREATHING*: Breathe quietly through the nose. Feel the inflations and deflations of the entire torso on each round of breathing.
11. IMPERCEPTIBLE FLUCTUATION: Feel the invisible flow, as the body moves in and out of balance, like underwater seaweed. This is a countermeasure to the tendency to become rigid or tense (or conversely, to go slack).
12. WHEN ATTENTION WANDERS: Awareness returns to the predominant movements and sensations, embraced by the environmental ambience.
13. SURROUNDINGS: My qigong teachers always emphasize the value of practicing in nature, particularly around greenery and water if possible. Classes or groups are often at parks or beaches, for a firsthand experience of the interplay of the chi of body, earth and sky.

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* BREATHING: In some qigong movements, inhales occur on upward or expansive movements, with exhales on downward or contracting movements. When practicing movements with a group, we follow the leader, unifying our movements (and breath if possible) to function as one, like an orchestra. When practicing alone, the natural breathing tempo determines the rate of the slower movements.