

## HOW TO MOVE

by Justin Stone

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It would be hard to over-emphasize the importance of the waist and the wrists in T'ai Chi Chih®. Many years ago, when I was first teaching beginners' classes, I would size up the new students by watching them when they first walked in. If the wrists were moving freely and the waist was soft and pliable, I knew they would be good students. However, where the wrists were stiff and tight and the waist was rigid, I realized it would take a good deal of effort to get them to do T'ai Chi Chih properly. The rigidity of the wrists and waist meant that they were tense inside, probably carrying many conflicts. Of course, T'ai Chi Chih practice, if performed properly, would loosen that rigidity (one of the ways that T'ai Chi Chih practice can help health), but the problem was that they would get the benefits only if they did the movements correctly. This is the biggest job of the teacher, I believe, to work hard to see that the students learn how to move correctly. Everything else is easy—third and fourth grade children have learned the movements without much difficulty.

One of the first things I would tell new students was that I was more interested in *how* they did their practice than in *what* they did. Everybody, at some time, has placed the arms or legs in the wrong place; that is only natural at the beginning and did not bother me. I was interested in seeing them flow (not move) from the T'an Tien, the flow being the motive force that allowed the arms and legs to move effortlessly. If the concept is one of exercising the arms and legs, against a stiff body, there is no way the student will get great benefits from practice.

One time I introduced a very good teacher to a family of eight and arranged for them to take private lessons from this teacher at their house. After the second lesson she phoned me and said she was making no progress in teaching the group T'ai Chi Chih. I guessed what was wrong and arranged to be at the next lesson. Before they all started moving, I said, "Forget all that you have learned. We're going to spend the entire lesson in showing you *how* to move, not teaching you movements to learn." After the afternoon had been spent in that way, with good results, I turned to the teacher and said, "You won't have any trouble now in teaching them T'ai Chi Chih." It went on to become a successful class.

Teachers! Please remember this reminder. Ninety percent of your initial effort must go in teaching students *how* to move, which means that you must perfect this knowledge for your own practice in order to teach it. This will not be difficult for a good teacher.