

Three Aspects toward Mastering Tai Chi by Corey Wong, Honolulu, HI, USA

Mastering Tai Chi.

What does this mean?

Watching a good tai chi performance, we consider the performer as someone who has mastered the art of tai chi. But tai chi has many layers.

The most obvious layer is **physical** – the form. When we watch tai chi being performed, we observe the movements to be smooth and graceful.

Learning the form, we initially focus on the movements, and then work on being smooth and coordinated.

Eventually, we may become graceful. For many practitioners, this is their objective.

But there are deeper unseen layers beyond the external form. Exploring these deeper levels is to delve into a journey without end.

To practice the internal part of tai chi is to practice qigong. Three aspects of all qigong are **to regulate the body, mind, and breath.**

Regulating the body is to do the tai chi form. The form, regardless of style, has a rhythmic movement of opening and closing, moving forward and backward, circling and rotating. These movements pump, squeeze, and guide Qi through the body. The movements may be external, but effects are internal.

Regulating the mind is calming the mind and spirit to have full awareness of all parts of the body, external and internal. External awareness includes knowing one's **balance**, body position, and **coordinated movements**. Internal awareness includes being **able to feel the sensation of qi and how the movements affect it**. Focusing solely on movement, one can miss the subtle sensations of qi. In the higher levels of qigong and tai chi, the mind's intent leads qi to initiate the movement.

The third aspect, **regulating the breath**, is a much focused part of qigong. Abdominal breathing or reversed abdominal breathing are the two most common.

Once the mind is calm and has entered into a **meditative** or near meditative state, the deeper and slower abdominal breathing naturally happens.

In Tai Chi, inhalation and exhalation follow the body movements. **One doesn't need to concentrate on when to inhale or exhale.** Doing so, the mind may be distracted from the awareness of qi or the intent of the movement. Let tai chi lead the breath, not the breath leading Tai Chi.

These three aspects of qigong will help deepen your experience of your Tai Chi journey. And the journey is within you. You will become a "master in an endeavour you can never master." But the experience is worth the journey.