

# *Acupressure points as related to*

## *Tai Chi*

Everyone these days seem to agree that Tai Chi has health benefits. Eminent scientists have tested it and found it to be the case. But what is this special something that Tai Chi seems to possess? Ask any experienced practitioner and I bet he or she too will be hard pressed to give a clear concise answer. Amongst the replies one will find the word 'relaxation', yet ask any beginner and it would seem the last thing that comes to mind about learning the complex movements standing still aching legs and arms, is relaxation. Then, too, posture will be mentioned but how many really understand the subtle nature of correct posture? Few I think. Good for stress maybe added. Then finally when the sceptical student with that questioning, I am still waiting for a credible, practical answer etched look on his or her face. One finally mumbles it's about Chi energy and you know by uttering that immortal word you've opened a whole bag of worms on the question of Chi and its nature. The student on realising that he or she is not going to get a sensible answer and do I look that gullible expression fixed firmly on their face walk away at the end of the class and you know they are wondering if it is worth the effort, and will they be back next week.

As a teacher one can only shrug, confident that possessing this semi mystical force from the Orient, one is sure of the fact that Chi is the answer even if you still don't fully grasp the answer to the riddle what is Chi, and if they don't want to believe then it's their loss! But there in lies the problem, do I believe in Chi or don't I and if I do believe in Chi is belief enough? What is it I am supposed to cultivate? What am I supposed to possess, especially if I can not feel Chi? Do I possess any, is it real or is it all self-deception, self-delusion? At this point the discerning reader of this article will be probably glancing back up at the title and will be asking what has all this to do with pressure points Meridians and channels? Please read on all will be made clear. The nature of Chinese medicine has a complex web of interrelated sign symptoms and correspondences that makes it very easy to overlay the traditional Chinese medicine model of points and channels on to various postures ascribing to the

postures various benefits and influences. While this may work for some people its danger is that it can be heavily loaded in cerebral self-satisfaction and one can quickly get mired in an evermore-complex spiral of relationships.

There is an old Chinese proverb that sort of sums up how to deal with the health aspects of Tai chi.

*I can tell you something but you will forget  
I can show you something but you will merely copy  
Do it for yourself then you will know.*

Each one of us is unique and will be looking for something slightly or radically different from the next person. When one thinks of Chinese medicine one naturally thinks of acupuncture and pressure points and not necessarily Tai Chi.

For my own self not finding answers initially in my Tai Chi and Kung Fu practice, I under took the study of Shiatsu. But this also did not answer the questions I was asking so a few years in Qi Gong and then back to Tai Chi with a different Teacher. And how different!

The first revelation personal to me and therefore not fantastic in any way made me realise the importance of posture and posture testing. I am not going to delve into the esoteric nature of posture testing that has to be transmitted from teacher to student i.e. he, she gets it, or they don't.

What sort of knocked me sideways was the simple obvious fact that if you get the posture right then the Chi is active. Or at least something fundamentally profound is happening to ones structure and posture. So understanding posture gives one a simple easy access to manipulating Chi whether you believe it is there or not. And it does not cost expensive specialised training courses in oriental medicine. The second point I understood, and this is were expensive time consuming Shiatsu training does come in, is the realisation that many if not all of the postural principles of Tai Chi create the same effect as the relevant function of the acupressure points themselves. This begs the question, which came first the point function or the postural practice. (It does not really matter either way I suppose).

Now before the magazine editor gets inundated with thousands of Tai Chi come acupuncturists complaining I am doing them out of business I am not saying that if you do Tai Chi correctly then you can get rid of the expensive oriental treatments. Tai chi practice is a general panacea for everything. It is not a cure but there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that it can have a strong effect in certain cases. What Tai Chi does have in common with most oriental based therapies is that it does have a balancing, revitalising, feel good effect and as one teacher (of Shiatsu) said the aim of diagnosis in hands-on therapies is to get to the source of the problem sooner rather than later. But any reorganising of the body-mind on any level of intervention will iron out the kinks and problems sooner or later so do not worry too much about it. A good treatment of any of the oriental systems hands-on or needles in approach has a strong affect in kick-starting the body's re-balancing engine back to life. Tai Chi can then be used to maintain its smooth running, optimising its efficiency. But if the individual does not take responsibility for their own health then they are going to build up a strong dependant and lasting relationship with their oriental health practitioner.

So in this article I would like to look at the basic principles of Tai Chi and relate them to the acupoints of the body. Please note that were ever possible I have tried to be true to the location and effect as humanly possible. I have not just picked points in a haphazard fashion. This relationship between points and effect I have personally discovered over the years and I am sure I am not the only one. Due to the restrictions on article size I have picked up on just a half dozen or so of the available points.

Bai Hui, Huiyin, Ming Men, Chi Hai, Shan Zhong. Lian Quan, Feng Fu Yong Quan

These points are all located on the Yin Yang orbit of the body more commonly known as the microcosmic orbit or small heavenly circulation.

See diagram

The function of this front back alignment is to circulate Chi rising up the back and sinking down the front to regulate and harmonise the Chi or Yin Yang flow of the body. In Tai Chi parlance we raise the spirit, pluck up the back and sink the chest. I have deliberately omitted the more specialised nature of these points and focused on the general benefits as related to direction of Chi or where it has correspondence with some beneficial aspect of Tai Chi.

Note when I use the terms Yin and Yang in relation to the points think of them as warming energising (yang), and cooling or calming (Yin).

### 1. **Du 20 - Bai Hui (Hundred Meetings)**

#### Location

At the very top of the head, where the midline intersects with a line joining the apex of the ears. What is colloquially known as the fontanel point on babies.

#### Action

Its action is to clear the mind and lift the spirit. Its name indicates the coming together of all the Yang energy.

#### Comments

This is the point where we talk about and experience the idea of lifting the head towards the sky. Practising this has a strong effect on our consciousness. Yang Qi or Spirit can energise the brain and mind; hence it is a good point to activate when the person is depressed and a reason why I would suggest that, on the whole, Tai Chi people are for the most part gregarious and happy.

### 2. **Ren 1 – Huiyin (Meeting of the Yin)**

#### Location

On the most Yin aspect of the torso, i.e. in the centre of the perineum, between the anus and the genitals.

#### Action

This point nourishes the body's Yin, calms the Spirit

#### Comment

It can be activated by relaxation and very gentle lifting. This has a secondary effect on energising the Dan Tian and connecting the Ren Mai (Governing Vessel) to open the lumbar spine and Gate of Life (Ming Men). This is a good point to activate if one has weak bladder or nocturnal emissions from yin deficiency. Also it is of benefit for prostate problems and prolapse.

### **3. Du 4 - *Ming Men* (Gate of Vitality)**

#### Location

On the back, at the level of the waist, between the spinous processes of vertebrae L2 and L3.

#### Actions

Tonifies Yang (warming) energy and the Kidneys (the storehouse of Essence). Good for lack of vitality and motivation. Major point for back pain. Strengthens the knees and spine.

#### Comments

Opening this area will align the tail bone, connect the torso to the legs, relax and balance the lower abdomen. The Ming Men is like the back door of the Dan Tian and can be focused on to strengthen the Yang aspect of the Dan Tian. This method is used if there is excessive heat and discomfort rising up the front causing congestion and fullness in the chest or if there are feelings of cold in the back.

### **4. Ren 6 - *Qi Hai* (Sea of Qi)**

#### Location

Approximately 2" below the navel on the centre line of the abdomen.

#### Actions

It regulates Qi, tonifies Qi and the Yang of the body. This is a major point for strengthening the system at a very deep level.

#### Comments

This point is often expressed as the Dan Tian. This is not strictly true. The Qi Hai point is the front access point to the Dan Tian (see Du 4 above for the connection at the back). This is a good point to warm for extreme physical and mental exhaustion. In Tai Chi we can do this by sealing the hands over this point. If we force and breath excessively to this point we may start to get over heated in the system, aim would then be to focus on the ming men to calm things down.

## **5. Ren 17 - *Shan Zhong* (Central Altar)**

### Location

In the centre of the sternum, on the midline, at the level of the nipples.

### Actions

This point Tonifies Chi in the chest, relaxes the diaphragm allows Qi to sink to the Dan Tian. It clears fullness and tightness from the chest, so improves respiration.

### Comments

By relaxing and sinking the chest we can access the Dan Tian. In Tai Chi we talk of sinking the chest and opening the back, which can have a strong affect on strengthening and balancing breathing. An oriental saying is, "A healthy person breathes from the Dan Tian, a sick person from the chest." Fullness in the chest can be linked to holding on to emotional baggage. Relaxing the breast bone naturally disperses the tightness from the chest. The entire Qi Gong model is one of balancing fire and water in the system. The fire of our emotions gets trapped if this point is not activated and by sinking it down we allow the fire to sink naturally to warm the lower area. Ming men is our seat of bodily warm even though it is water in characteristic, this water is more akin to the circulation of fluid in your central heating system. Regulation of temperature is important

## **6. Ren 23 - *Lian Quan* (Pure Spring)**

### Location

On the mid line of the throat above the Adam's apple where a depression is felt

### Actions

Opens the throat connects the yin channels of the arm with the body subdues fire aids swallowing

### Comments

I have included this point as it relates to the postural aspect of tucking in the chin. This sinks Chi, relaxes the body (swallow your pride) *my words*. It is an area that tightens up if you try too hard or think you may have something important to say. (Chin protruding). It relaxes the tongue. If you talk too much fire rises up the front instead of sinking energetically. Fire energy can often be seen as weak and superficial. Fire burns above the earth and seems to float rather than anchored to it. Rising fire stimulates the mind and can tire the mind with over thinking. It is the intersection point of the Yin linking vessel of the arm, which connects the inside of the arms to the torso.

## **7. Du 16 Feng Fu (Wind Palace)**

### Location

Directly below the ridge of the occipital bone in the depression on the midline of the spine

### Actions

Clears the mind, it is said many diseases of the legs and feet are treated through this point. Good point for nosebleeds, and stiff necks. Links yang aspect of the arms to the torso.

### Comments

There is a relationship between this point and Ren 23 tucking in the chin opens the neck and activates du 16, this relationship balance the upward flow of Chi in the spine with the outward flow. One reason why Chi does not always flow out to the arms clearly is because stagnation of Chi in this area.

## **Kidney 1 Yongquan (Bubbling Spring)**

Location: In the depression appearing on the sole of the foot when the toes are curled.

### Actions

Calms the mind, clears heat and has strong sinking action, tonifies yin.

### Comments

When our feet are relaxed this point will naturally open. Often students complain of heat in the feet during Chi Kung practice. One reason is tension and holding in the feet. I often use the expression 'stand on the ground not on your own two feet' to aid in the letting go and sinking the Chi. This point will aid stronger rooting and balance. A good understanding of its role and position in Tai Chi is of the utmost importance. Also in his marvellous book "Jobs body" Deane Juhan recounts this about stimulating the sole of the feet. If a person is lying asleep, quick firm pressure on the soles of the feet is very likely to wake him up. This is the result of a sensory stimulation activating the reticular formation and arousing the system in readiness to act. But if the pressure on the soles of the feet is quick enough and strong enough something much more specific than general arousal takes place: The muscles of the body- and particularly those of the feet and legs- contract and brace themselves at the same lengths and tension values appropriate for maintaining a standing posture. This point

is also one of those points that I learnt in my martial arts training can be used to wake up an unconscious person.

The next three points are an addition to the article as it was originally printed as due to room there was not the scope. However these next three points I feel are invaluable to illustrate the interconnectedness of the movement and points and also it goes a long way to explaining I think as to why Chi Gong postures follow a simple pattern of movement.

### **Pericardium 6 *Nei guan* (Inner Gate)**

Location: Three fingers width below the wrist crease on the medial aspect of the arm, in the between the tendons.

#### Action

From a Chi Gong perspective this point opens the inner gates diaphragms of the torso allowing vital fluids to flow throughout the body which regulates temperature of the body San Jiao hence it is effect in harmonising stomach, (this is the travel sickness sea sickness point.) calms the mind opens the chest. It also is the main point for relief of pain or discomfort in the chest as it moves Chi and blood.

#### Comments

This point is simulated with the flexing of the wrist and extension of the arm most common image would be the little Buddha's statues that are often seen in ethnic gift shops and martial arts stores showing a monk pushing up against the sky in a classic Ba Duan Jin posture. The "settling breath" postures that are performed at the end of each session in the academy one can see why this simple routine is a good practice for balancing the energy and settling body and mind. See previous article

### **Triple burner 5, *Wai Guan*, (Outer Gate)**

Location opposite the Nei guan point on the outside of the arm 3 fingers from the wrist crease between the radius and ulna bones.

#### Action

This is major point to releases to the exterior, used to expel pathogens when they are starting to take hold, that stage when you know you are coming down with a cold; sore throat maybe feeling hot or alternate hot and chills. According to some sources it can actually expel all six pathogens as recognised in Chinese medicine namely

wind, heat, cold, damp, dryness and fire. It is the Yang linking vessel i.e. controls and regulates the flow of Chi to the exterior.

### Comments

Because it controls and regulates Chi flow to the exterior it is literally the point associated with ward of postures literally warding off at all levels from the physical to the pathogenic. The nature of this country's climate is one of damp cold, which has a heavy stubborn lethargy imbued into its energetic quality, and I feel this is why Tai Chi goes a long way to strengthen the body and transforming the mental process not just this point but together as a whole the Tai Chi reflects the open natural harmonising quality of the system.

### Final thoughts

These points as described in this article are just a sample of the relationship between the classical points in Chinese medicine and the careful alignments and use of body posture is used in Tai Chi. There is not the space in this article to describe the particular relationship of other points that have a similar correspondence nor do I think is there a need to as it would simply add to the constant proliferation of secondary information relating to Tai Chi. The aim was to simply show and illustrate for those individuals who are either confused or feel that they are missing some vital piece of information regarding their Tai Chi practice that in truth adherence to the correct principles is really enough. So, hopefully armed with this information one is able to let go and relax just a little more.