Taiji / Qi Gong Warm ups

Basic Alignment: feet basically shoulder width and straight = stacking

The bows:

1. Spine lift head suspend, belly soft.

2 & 3. Air under the arms, heavy in the elbow & soften, open and extend the fingers.

4 & 5. Soften the knee slightly outward to round the groin.

6. Hollow the chest; settle the energy in the chest DOWN to the ground, *allowing the tailbone to settle.*

What we are studying: no matter what we are doing, whether our warm ups, form, or regular daily movement, Taiji is a study of *how we move,* with the intention of *taking care of ourselves.* Remember throughout either the exercises or regular movement, we are training our *proper comfortable body alignment.*

\*\*\*Honoring you! Do what is comfortable for you ~ what I share with you is an example. Your body is unique, as are your needs ~ make this practice work for you and make the movements your own as you need.

Basic Principles

* Taiji is a study of internal movement: learning to use our mind intent to lead our energy. Then, we train the body to follow the energy. It is not the external body leading the movement, but instead, the internal movement leading the external body. BREATH is connected to our energy. Learn to let your movements be led by your mind intent, breath/energy, with the goal of nourishing the body, mind, and spirit.
* Begin by imagining you are in water. Let the body gently ebb and flow. The goal is to let the body be COMFORTABLE. Let the body move. Feel free to spend a few minutes moving the body how You want to, playing with our Taiji principles.
* Honor your body and what is comfortable for you, NO STRAINING.
* Our goal is to learn about SOFT movement.
* Soft movement comes from 1. Our INTENTION = to nurture ourselves and our bodies. 2. From our movement feeling like we are in water, i.e. nothing is abrasive, harsh, hurried. 3. Movement is curved / circular. There are no straight lines. 4. Like the figure 8, *infinity,* circular soft movement is also CONTINUOUS. There is no stop and start. Stopping and starting creates impact and wear and tear. Our goal is to learn to minimize this.
* Whole body move together. Learn to get the whole body involved in the movement, not just isolating for example only the arms. The whole body expands with the inhale, the whole body settles with the exhale.
* Last, what you do should *feel good:* let this be your compass. When there is pain or discomfort, start by making the movement smaller…. Remember, what is important is the *quality* of your movement, and this is an Internal study of intention, energy, *then* movement. We are doing INTERNAL SELF MASSAGE. Not an aerobic work out.

Warm Ups: *note usually repetitions of 8-10 times, but do at least 4.*

In between various exercises and as needed:

*\*\*\*Gathering energy to Wash through the body or Store the energy in the dantian, the lower belly (below the belly button)/ our energy storage bank. Inhaling, circle both arms down and out then up above the head, exhaling use that energy as you need pressing the arms gently down together in front of you.\*\*\**

1. Self-massage: warm up the hands, energy and heat, then massage the body. Using circles, squeezing, patting, rubbing, explore waking up the circulation and energies throughout your whole body. You can start anywhere, but it is a good idea to do the WHOLE BODY, one simple way is to start at your head and work your way down.
2. Neck: using the eyes and breath to lead the movement.
   1. Eyes tracking the horizontal plane at eye level, *Inhaling* looking from center to one side, gazing behind you, *Exhaling* back to center.
   2. Chin gently towards the chest, spine still feeling extended not collapsed. The plane the eyes are tracking – *Inhale* looking from in between the feet directly out to the side across the floor, up the wall towards the ceiling, *Exhale* back towards center.
   3. Chin again towards the chest. Hands in gentle fists at the shoulders. Slightly bend in the knees. Pushing off the ground *inhale,* body expands with the breath extending through the legs, through the torso, then into the arms extending up & looking up. The plane the eyes are tracking starts in between the feet, goes directly out in front of you across the ground, then up the wall to the sky. *Exhale* back to beginning, letting the body soften, elbows heavy, like gravity pulling you back down to settle into your feet.
3. Shoulder Circles: Whole body, not just shoulder and muscles around scapula. Pushing off the floor *inhale* body expands with the breath; letting the circle come into the shoulders, *exhale* circling down and settling back into the feet. One direction then the other.
4. Elbow Circles: Letting the arm fall naturally, learn to pivot from the elbow as you draw a circle, rotating from the elbow, using the breath naturally, how *efficient* can your movement be. Keeping the hands wrist relaxed and soft. One arm then the other.
5. Ward off Arthritis - Hands / Fingers / Wrists: Opening, closing the fingers and hand, moving all the different joints in all the directions you can, using our taiji principles of circular fluid soft movement, remember the thumb as well to circle it and pull it back. Helping the body to release built up tension and strain, maintaining mobility.
6. Massage the Heart and Lungs: internal circle in the chest, as if behind the sternum, circling energy back and down slightly in, then up and back around. Breathe naturally. Work gently with it. This is an INTERNAL movement and will appear from the outside, to be quite subtle.
7. Circles in the Hips:
   1. Horizontal Circles – mind intent draws the circle, energy follows, using the stomach muscle to make the circle as well, in order to massage the internal organs and lower spine. One direction then the other.
   2. Vertical- as if a pen is attached to my hip sticking out, and a pad of paper to the side of me, I draw the circle on that piece of paper. This exercise is \*\*\*FOR THE LOWER BACK\*\*\* in particular. Using the stomach muscle as well, massaging the spine and organs. One Direction then the other.
   3. Stomach only – as if the face of a clock, move the stomach muscle circling around the belly button, one direction then the other, massaging the organs this direction.
8. Knees: Warming up the hands to warm up the knees, clapping: energy heat in the hands. Massage the knees as well as warming up the legs. Circles: Feet roughly shoulder width staying flat on the ground, circling the knees opposite directions towards each other, working and massaging the ligaments and tendons throughout the leg. Reverse directions. Feet coming together, circle the knees the same direction. Reverse directions. Breathing naturally.
9. Stretching the Spine & Legs: letting the body hang, stretching the body, do what feels good. Allow the body to move, stretching different parts of the leg, allowing the head to hang gently pulling and stretching the spine, bend the knees, squat down if you’d like. KEY: do what feels good to you.
10. Ankles: our weight like water, 50% in each leg when standing in our neutral position. Shifting weight to one side like pouring water through the bow in the legs slightly to one side, knee bends slightly to absorb the added weight, heel of the foot light and off the ground, ball of foot connected to ground. Circle with the knee, one direction then the other.

BOW STANCE

Feet shoulder width, stacking, set up the bows. KEY POINT> maintain shoulder width. Weight like water, to turn right, I must first go left…..

EX> weight slightly shift left. Gently press into the heel of the Right foot ball of the foot becomes light, pivoting on the heel, rotate the hip right to 45degrees, foot follows. ESTABLISH THE 45. Shift your weight by moving the hip to center on the right leg, remember bow in the leg the knee goes out as you sit down, as if on a stool. STEP OUT; heel where the toe was, maintaining the same width. Shift weight forward by pressing off the back foot. END position, 60% weight forward, both feet flat on the ground. Front foot pointed straight i.e. the direction I am going, the back foot is 45 degrees. Hip, 45 degrees. Important point: front knee does not pass toe in end position.

Taiji Walking. Moving from one bow stance to another. Using the same principles, from the bow stance, moving into another: weight slightly shift back by pushing off the front leg, pivot on the heel, rotate the hip to establish the new 45, shifting your weight and sitting bring the foot to center. Stepping out shoulder width, moving weight forward.

This will help you to determine what really is a COMFORTABLE bow stance for you, as well as give good practice for balance & smooth movement.

FORM

Yang Style Long form, Section I

1. Prepare (the bows)
2. Open
3. Grasp Sparrow Tail
   * Ward off Left
   * Ward off Right
   * Lu
   * Ji
   * An
4. Single Whip
5. Lift Hands
6. White Crane Spreads Wings
7. *Left brush knee*
8. *Strum the lute*
9. *Left Brush knee*
10. *Right Brush knee*
11. *Left brush knee*
12. *Strum the Lute*
13. *Left brush knee*
14. Parry, Intercept & Punch
15. Seal
16. Cross hands (double ward off to close)