

Patterns and Motion

Some advice on learning new postures or forms

Pattern Recognition

When we are born one of the first things the brain learns to do is recognise patterns (the human face: Mother, our source of nourishment and protection). Pattern recognition is very strong and, for most people, it remains so for the whole lifetime; think how often you see 'faces' in patterns on wallpaper or even in clouds. We naturally look for patterns of familiarity to feel secure.

Part of learning a new posture involves seeing the pattern of movement, then through copying and repetition it becomes familiar enough to begin to feel it in your own body. If you're learning a new Form, most likely before a posture becomes second nature you'll be asked to learn another one. Starting to learn a new posture (an unfamiliar pattern) has the effect of increasing, by contrast, the familiarity of the previous one. Whether you are just beginning Taiji or Qigong, or if you are a more experienced student learning a new Form, it is helpful to remember this process and recognise how your familiarity with preceding movements deepens as you continue to add new ones. This process is yet another pattern. Of course, this will only work if you practise: no practise, no familiarity, no pattern.

The brain is finely tuned to movement

Learning new Forms or Postures engages fundamental, or even primal,

parts of the brain. As well as pattern recognition we also use motion detection. As part of the survival mechanism, we are acutely aware of movement in our immediate environment.

Our eyes and attention are instantly drawn to the slightest movement. At the primal level of survival movement could mean, a) food for us if we are the hunter or, b) we are in danger of becoming food for predators. It's not very likely that you will be leapt on by a tiger, but if, out of the corner of your eye, you see a spider running across the floor, most people will have an immediate response to look and see what it is as that primal instinct has triggered. The brain is finely tuned to movement.

In learning new 'patterns', particularly in Taiji and Qigong, we have to be very conscious of the instinctive response when looking as the eyes will be drawn to the most obvious movement - this is usually the hands. The more experienced of you will know that this is the last place you need to look as this is the end result of what is going on.

The process or pattern of learning a movement

Firstly, look to the feet and the waist to give you the foundation, the arms and hands give the final definition, or character of the posture.