

## Yiquan Training: Mind-Intent

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The Chinese character *Yi* (意) has multiple meanings: intent, intention, thought, think, mind, fame of mind, awareness, attention, imagine, visualization, focus concentration, feeling, sense, perception etc. For use in Yiquan discussions, we have translated *Yi* (意) as *mind-intent*.

Yiquan emphasizes the supreme importance of *attention, visualization, and the intentional component of the mind* through out its training. Mind and body are synthesized into a whole-body harmony unity with the use of mental directed activities (*Yi Nian You Dao*, 意念诱导), mental induced isometric opposing forces (*Zheng Li*, 争力), kinesthesia (*Ti Ren*, 体认), and visualized resistance (*Ti Cha Zu Li*, 体察阻力). Mind-intent (*Yi*, 意) is involved in every aspect of Yiquan training to cultivate the *balanced force* (*Hun Yuan Li*, 浑元力): relaxed standing (*Zhan Zhuang*, 站桩) is mental directed development of the *balanced force* in *stillness*; trial and feel (*Shi Li*, 试力) is mental directed development of the *balanced force* in *motion*; and power discharge/release (*Fa Li*, 发力) is mental directed development of the *balanced force* in *harmony of action, in focus concentration with rapid relaxation/tension exchange*.

Using mind-intent (*Yi*, 意) to direct/guide your training and conditioning is the essence of Yiquan. It is used:

1. To develop mental directed activities and visualization,
2. To manage stress and to nurture mind-body relaxation,
3. To develop visualization and kinesthetic perception to ingrain maneuvers into muscle memory,
4. To achieve whole-body *alignment, connected-ness*, and mind-body coordination through mental induced isometric opposing forces,
5. To gain total control of neuromuscular relaxation/tension exchanges,
6. To cultivate whole-body harmony and the *balanced force* with visualized resistance and kinesthetic perception of force transmission through elements of the body, and
7. To internalize maneuvers into spontaneous reflexes through crises rehearsals.

The quintessential exercise to initiate your Yiquan training is the parallel step relaxed standing posture for health. As examples of using mind-intent (*Yi*, 意), we will describe this posture and explain two elementary mental directed activities:

- A. To nurture mind-body relaxation, and
- B. To cultivate neuromuscular coordination.

## The Parallel Step Posture (*Cheng Bao Zhuang*, 撑抱桩)

Stand erect; feet shoulder width apart; outside edges of feet approximately parallel. Keep your spine erect and imagine a string attached to and pulling the top of your head upwards; feel like slightly pushing up with your head. Bend the knees slightly (not straight and not locked); visualize holding a balloon between your knees or visualize imaginary springs connecting your knees. Imagine applying inward pressure below your knees and outward pressure above your knees; do not crush or drop the imaginary balloon. Relax the lower back thus allowing the pelvis to roll very slightly forward, filling out the small of the back as if you are sitting on a high stool; let your spine hang neutrally straight. Visualize imaginary springs connecting your feet to your head; mildly stretch these imaginary springs. Lift hands up to shoulder level; form a circle with your arms; hands higher than your elbows, two to three fists width apart, approximately a foot from your chest; palms facing your face. Visualize imaginary connecting springs between your wrists and between your wrists and your neck. *Prop* your elbows out to your sides slightly below the level of the shoulders as if holding imaginary balloons under your upper arms; leveling your elbows with your shoulders will drop the balloons; dropping your elbows to your sides will crush them. Direct your primary intent to *hugging-in* and secondary intent to *propping-open* (i.e., more closing intent, 70%, than propping intent, 30%). Imagine holding a lightweight fragile paper balloon between your arms and chest. Applying too much force will crush this balloon; not enough force will result in dropping it. Keep your fingers apart and slightly bend; imagine holding cotton balls between your fingers. Direct these actions with your mind-intent (*Yi*, 意); do not use any brute strength. Keep all joints relaxed and flexible.

The head and neck should be held erect, tuck-in the chin slightly as if holding a small balloon between it and the neck. Relax the facial muscles; almost smile. Lightly touch the teeth together. Allow the tongue to lie naturally; do not be concerned with it touching any particular place in the mouth. Part the mouth slightly. Breathe naturally; specifically do not pay conscious attention to inhaling or exhaling; do not hold or lengthen your breath. Direct your eyes to a distant object; imagine looking through a light fog at birds flying near a distant cloud. See the imaginary “blue” sky. Stay alert; listen passively as you would to the sound of falling rain.

It is important to keep the shoulders down and relaxed, shoulders level. Visualize imaginary springs connecting your wrists and your wrists to your neck. The feet should be flat on the ground with not much weight on your heels, with your weight distributed equally between them, centered in your base. All body joints maintain a bend between 90 and 180 degrees. Align your musculoskeletal structure to maintain your posture, supporting your weight, and relax all your antagonistic muscles. Visualize “*hanging*” your muscles on your skeletal structure.

These are the physical requirements for the parallel step relaxed standing postures for health. However, once acquired, you should not be conscious of these requirements. Instead of trying to consciously maintain and conform to the specifics, pretend you have already satisfied all these requirements.

## A. Using mind-intent (*Yi*, 意) to nurture mind-body relaxation

Stand in the parallel step posture; breathe naturally, do not pay conscious attention to inhaling and/or exhaling; maintain your *frame* with musculoskeletal support, relax your antagonistic muscles and your mind-body; focus your attention and awareness on neuromuscular relaxation (*Fang Song*, 放松).

To relax, adopt a passive attitude. Do everything *with no conscious effort* as if nothing critical is happening. Instead of trying to achieve mind-body relaxation and harmony, pretend you have already mastered this relaxation. Do not consciously help or hinder your effort.

Mentally, do not attempt to resist and/or retain any thoughts. Let your thoughts come and go naturally. Blocking a stressful thought (obsessive worry or negative thought) drives it deeper into your memory. Instead, to avoid stressful thoughts, direct the mind towards happy relaxing thoughts to facilitate relaxation. This is the “*principle of replacement*”, i.e., you replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts.

You must achieve mind-body relaxation before you can do any other mental directed activities. If you find difficulties in maintain this parallel step posture after standing for a short period of time, you must not be relaxing appropriately. Mentally perform self-examination and self-exploration. Starting from your head downwards, mentally check to see if each and every body part is relaxed and comfortable. If not, tense the respective part slightly, and then relax and release it to achieve natural relaxation. Make any adjustments as necessary to be relaxed and comfortable. You may shift your weight forward/backward or move your arms slightly to relieve muscular tension. Here, the initial goal is not endurance in maintaining any posture; the initial goal is achieving mind-body relaxation.

With your mind-body in a relaxed state, it is easier for you to “try to figure out” the force embedded in your intentional component of your mind (*Chuai Mo Yi Zhong Li*, 揣摩意中力), to gain total control of neuromuscular relaxation/tension exchanges, and to cultivate the whole-body *balanced force* through meeting visualized resistance (*Ti Cha Zu Li*, 体察阻力) and kinesthetic perception of force transmission through elements of the body (*Xun Zhao Jing Lu*, 寻找劲路).

## B. Using mind-intent (*Yi*, 意) to cultivate neuromuscular coordination and control of relaxation/tension exchange

After you have mastered mind-body relaxation, as a second step, you can cultivate whole-body neuromuscular coordination with a kinesthetic perception exercise of meeting visualized resistance:

Visualize standing in the parallel step posture in waist deep water with imaginary connecting springs between your hands and between your wrists and your neck. First imagine the water flows in from your back, pushing on your body. Shift your weight to your rear to meet this force,

stretch your spine (uncoiling your back to stretch the imaginary springs connecting your feet to your head) and use a whole-body effort to pull your arms slightly backward, upward, and outward. Do not lean backwards; keep your toes on the ground while stretching the imaginary springs between your knees and your wrists slightly. All joints should flex slightly.

Then imagine the water flows in from your front, pushing on your body. Shift your weight forward to meet this force, compress your spine (coiling your back compressing the imaginary springs connecting your feet to your head), sink down your whole-body and press your arms forward, downward, and inward. Keep your heels on the ground, “*drill*” your feet downwards while squeezing the imaginary springs between your knees and your wrists together slightly. Flex every joint slightly.

Do these forward/backward oscillations slowly and evenly; *feel* the drag of the imaginary water on your entire body as you rock forward and backward; *feel* every joint (ankle, knee, hip, spine, shoulder, elbow and wrist) moving (opening and closing) slightly. Once you have a feel of your body movement, minimize and internalize your movement, your motion becomes motionless. Visualize doing this exercise with no physical movement and no brute strength; focus your mind-intent (*Yi*, 意) to guide your action yet do not be conscious of your visualization. Eventually, whether the water is moving you or you are moving the water becomes “fuzzy”.

We have described two examples of using mind-intent in training. These elementary exercises will start you on the road towards the development of your *balanced force* (*Hun Yuan Li*, 浑元力). While gaining total control of your neuromuscular relaxation/tension exchanges (*Song Jin Zhuan Huan*, 松紧转换) is essential (being able to rapidly switching between maneuvers is the basis of *agility*, the basis of Yiquan’s time-based fast transient response), you must begin with slow comfortable actions and relaxed mind-body to synthesize your neuromuscular coordination (*Ji Rou Ru Yi*, 肌肉如一).

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