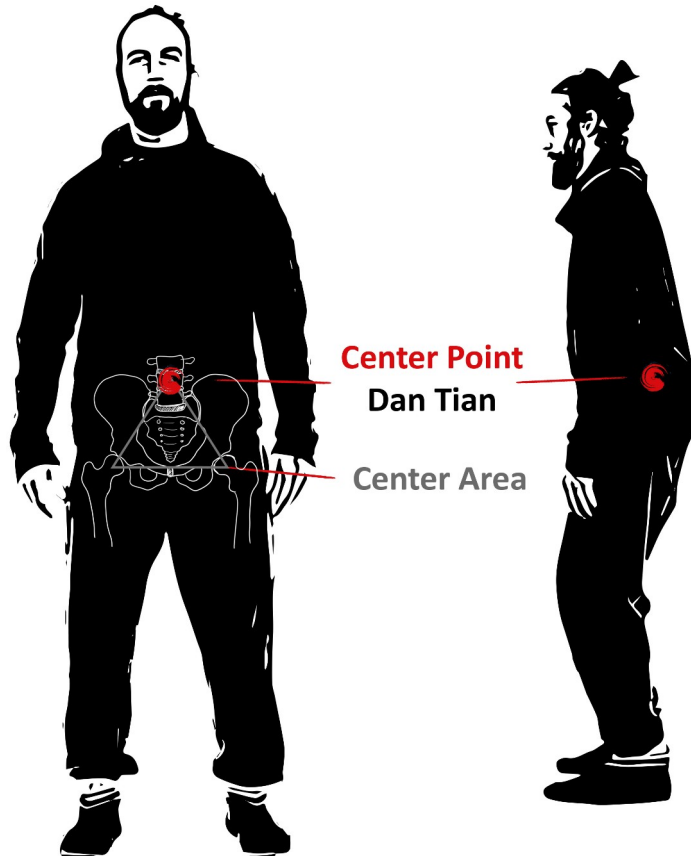


The Center and the 3 Circles

The Center – Overview

The Center Area, the Center Point and the Dan Tian



Whenever Yin and Yang converge, a third entity emerges: In the realm of our bodies, this third force is known as the Center.

Looking at the concept of the Center in internal martial arts, it can be beneficial to delineate it into three distinct yet interconnected components:

- The Center Area (Picture: Triangle)
- The Center Point (Picture: Tip of Triangle)
- The Dan Tian (Picture: Red Point)

While all three terms ultimately refer to the same concept, it still makes sense to differentiate them into three distinct terms. This allows for a heightened awareness of various aspects of the center and facilitates a gradual development of proper center usage while maintaining an overview.

The Center Area

The Center Area encompasses the region in our body where the Center Point and the Dan Tian are situated. Positioned in the middle of our body, it shares a close relationship with the anatomy of pelvis and hip joints. Serving as the juncture where upper body motion converges with lower body motion, it houses the body's most powerful muscles, endowing it with substantial muscular potential. These attributes transform this area into a hub for power generation, exchange, and guidance. It becomes the focal area from which coordinated and accelerated movements of the entire body originate, fostering a holistic approach to motion and the realization of one's full potential in terms of power, speed, and health.

The Center Point

The most central point of the Center Area we define as Center Point (Picture: Tip of Center Triangle). The Center Point acts as the physical connection point where forces from the upper and lower body converge. Here, hip joints, sacroiliac joints (pelvis), and spine intertwine, exchanging their motions. Due to its central location and its interconnectedness with all body parts, it can be compared to the general in an ancient army. In every internal martial art movement, adherence to this central point's commands is crucial, as each motion originates, concludes, and harmonizes within this point. Being essentially the core of the Center Area, its motion is dictated likewise by the movements of the hip joints, sacroiliac joints, and the lower back spine.

The Dan Tian

The Dan Tian is situated precisely at the location of the Center Point, found three fingers below the navel in the middle of the body. However, it should not be regarded as identical to the Center Point. While the Center Point and Center Area are more physical nature, the Dan Tian serves as the connection point between the physical and the non-physical. It is a nexus where the body and mind converge, and where Jing (Essence), Qi (Inner Flow), and Shen (Spirit) come together for transformation.

The Dan Tian can therefore be considered as the non-physical counterpart of the Center Point. It is not a point to be precisely located within our body but rather one that we can nurture by consistently directing our attention to the Center Area, projecting a point into its midst. The initial step in this process involves reestablishing a breathing habit where the breath initiates and concludes with a gentle motion in the lower belly (Natural Breath). As the breath fills and releases the Center Area, the mind can gradually find comfort in this region. Through careful nurturing, akin to a farmer tending to the soil with attention and breath, the Dan Tian (Elixir Field) can slowly be cultivated. This field then becomes a central point in the cultivation and transformation of energy on the internal martial arts journey.

The Center and Chain motion from Mind to Body

Spirit/Mind (Yi) - Dan Tian - Center Point - Center Area - Body Motion

In simple terms, every movement commences with the intention of the mind (Yi). This intention fills the body with movement potential or energy, providing direction and motion to the Center Point. Consequently, the entire Center Area moves, and ideally, the rest of the body follows suit. In this way, every motion becomes a chain, originating in the mind and unfolding into actual physical motion.

Like a stone dropping into water, these motions create ripples. These ripples grow larger as they move away from the initial point. Only when the water is still can the ripples remain visible in more distant areas.

This metaphor helps us understand how the chain of internal motions relies on the Center. Simultaneously, the softness, quietness, and freedom of both body and mind become an indispensable foundation for practice. During the initial years of practice, various bodily incoordinations and tensions may hinder us from effectively transmitting the motion from the center to the body. How can one move from the center when there are no muscular or coordinative connections to our Center Area? Moreover, how can someone transmit Center Motion when blockages, such as those in the spine, impede the free travel of the chain to other areas of the body?

After several years of practice, these initial challenges start to find solutions, leading us to encounter new levels of difficulty. As mentioned earlier, the motion does not originate from the Center Area nor Center Point. Once the physical aspect of the Center becomes more controlled, through continued practice, we can gain awareness of how the chain motion starts even before: at our Mind, more specific the Yi (Intention). The more we refine how the mind commands the movement into our body, the more we can begin to cease wasting energy on a subtler level.

In this process, we begin to understand that many of our actions are performed with excessive inner tension and pressure due to a tendency of "over-wanting." We often try to force our body to move, creating tension in both mind and body. While becoming aware of physical tensions is already challenging, it demands even greater sensitivity to notice the tension we create in our mind before moving. This implies that, to extend the chain motion beyond our physical Center Area, we must observe how we prevent the ripples of motion,

from spreading throughout our body starting at a non-physical level.

In the teachings of the Wu Shen (Five Spirits), we learn that the Zhi Spirit (Will Spirit) is the final instance creating motion. However, our Will Spirit is often too strong, conditioned to be overused without us being aware of it. Consequently, motions are executed with excessive inner tension even before transitioning into actual physical motion. This tendency leads to the wasteful expenditure of energy, hindering the long-term cultivation of our energetic center point, the Dan Tian, and disrupting the movement chain from Mind to Dan Tian into the body.

The ultimate goal of movement creation in internal martial arts is "to move without moving", fully embodying the principle of Wu Wei (non-interference or doing without doing). The movement should not be executed by us but instead flow through us. On this level of practice, the fundamental aspect is the awareness and observation of how motion is created before it manifests. Only then do we start to realize how much we do without noticing it.

The Center and its role in Internal Martial Arts

Given that the text will first concentrate on the physical aspects of the Center, for the sake of simplicity, the term "Center" will primarily encompass the Center Point and Center Area, excluding the Dan Tian. The Dan Tian will be further explored in a subsequent section of the text.

Regardless of the martial art form, the Center plays a crucial role. It acts as the channel for accelerating and guiding power throughout the body.

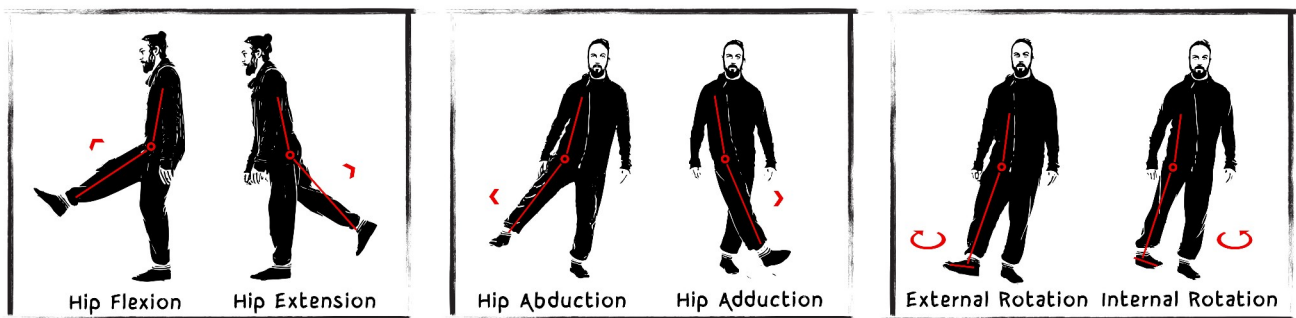
The power generated by the legs can only be transmitted to the upper body for strikes or takedowns when the Center coordinates and harmonizes the leg movements with the arms. Conversely, the Center is crucial for efficiently guiding an incoming force into the ground, redirecting it into the lower body. Simultaneously, understanding the Center is paramount in maintaining the own or disrupting an opponent's balance.

Taking a closer look at inner martial arts reveals that every motion in Tai Ji, Ba Gua, or Xing Yi relies in one or the other form on the movement of the Center. In Tai Ji, for instance, each motion originates and culminates in the Center area. Motions are categorized as Yang motions, moving away from the Center, or Yin motions, moving into the Center. These motions traverse the body, fostering a mode of movement that progressively releases tension, guiding motion from the Center through the spine, both vertically and horizontally.

The Center and its dependency of Hip Joint and Tail Bone Area.

As the Center Point lies within our pelvis, the proficiency in guiding and coordinating the Center is intricately linked to the ability to freely use our hip joints and tailbone area. This is a common hurdle for many practitioners who often falsely equate the pelvis with the hips. The challenge lies in understanding that pelvic motions rely on the hip joints on one side and the sacrum area on the other. The coordination and freedom of these distinct areas establish the groundwork for a liberated and three-dimensional range of motion. It is crucial to comprehend that the pelvis rests upon the hip joints.

Three Hip Joint Movement Axis

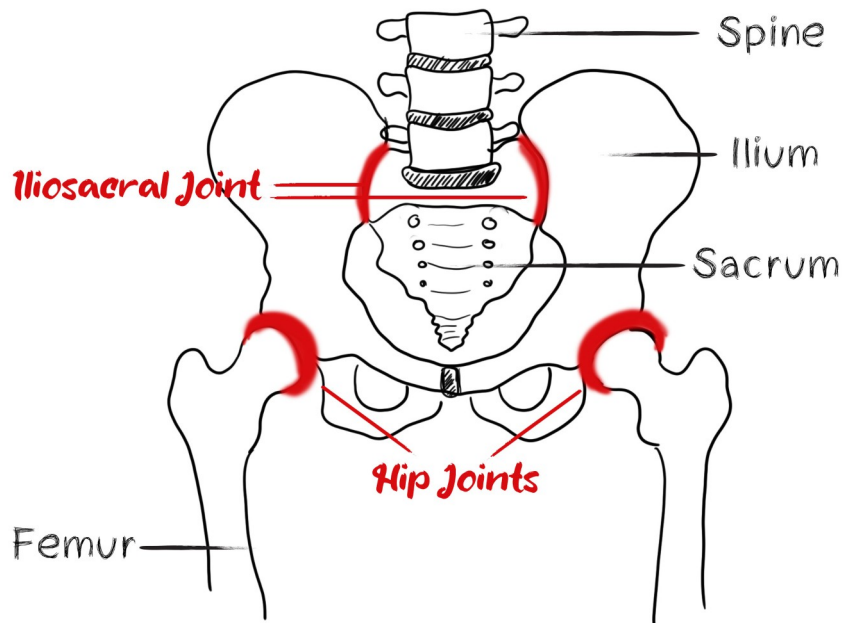


Only when we can utilize our pelvis freely in all directions can we ensure its most efficient coordination of upper and lower body, Yin and Yang. The ability to move our Center Area and Center Point is therefore inseparably tied to our capacity to flex and extend, abduct and adduct, and rotate the hip joints in and out. Although this may seem logical and clear, an anatomically untrained person may struggle to clearly grasp how to flex and extend the hips, often starting already by facing difficulty in identifying the position of the hip joints. Thus, a precise training regimen focusing on hip coordination and pelvis motion appears indispensable in the education of inner martial arts.

On the other side of the pelvis, the sacrum area plays a crucial role in providing our Center with an additional layer of freedom. Movement from the pelvis can only be guided into the spine, and vice versa, when the sacrum area enjoys freedom of motion. When examining the anatomical region of the sacrum, it becomes apparent that between the sacrum and pelvic bones (Ilium), two joints exist: the sacroiliac joints. These joints bear the majority of the upper body's weight through a ligament connection into the pelvis. However, the movement capabilities of these joints are typically severely restricted due to a lifetime of incorrect or insufficient usage. The ligaments connecting the pelvis and sacrum become stiff, consequently limiting the free movement and transmission of force through our pelvis.

The encouraging is that through the harmonization and establishment of more liberated hip joints and pelvis motion, the sacroiliac joints also have the potential to regain their former flexibility. Once again, they can become a crucial component in fully utilizing our Center Area.

Pelvis Anatomy



The Three Pelvic (Center) Circles

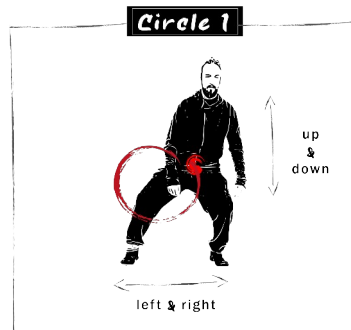
The Three Center Circles serve as a foundational tool on the journey to restoring a healthy and holistic pelvis and center utilization. As students progress, they gradually grasp the intricacies of moving the pelvis in three different dimensions, utilizing all hip axes of motion while paying careful attention to the sacrum area.

First Stage of Circling:

In the first stage of practice, practitioners focus on circling the pelvis independently in each plane. The three circles are:

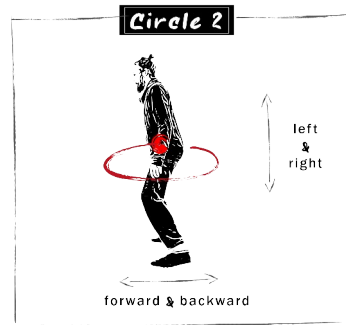
CIRCLE 1:

Circling up and down
from left to right



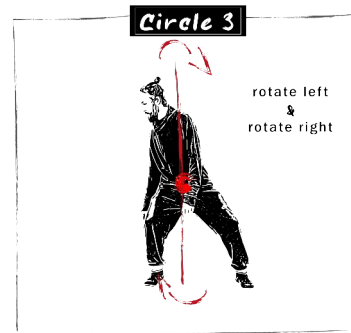
CIRCLE II:

Circling forward and backwards
from left to right



CIRCLE III:

Rotating in and out



Throughout each circle, practitioners should adhere to fundamental Qi Gong alignment principles. This includes maintaining a parallel stance, bent knees, a lowered back, a soft front hip area, an empty chest, and a light head. While executing the circles, it's crucial to ensure that they remain consistently sized in all directions, maintaining a perfectly round shape. Simultaneously, the movements should be deliberate, slow, and careful. Students are advised to avoid any painful sensations and adjust the circle size if discomfort arises around the hip and knee joints.

Through endless, slow, and mindful repetitions, students gradually internalize the distinct planes of pelvis motion, using them to uncover various tensions around the sacrum, hip joint, and knee joint areas. This dedicated practice allows students to observe and release these tensions over time. Similar to water gradually shaping a stone into roundness and softness, the practice of these circles molds the pelvis area, fostering roundness and softness, releasing tension, and cultivating an awareness of efficient pelvis and center usage.

Second Stage of Circles:

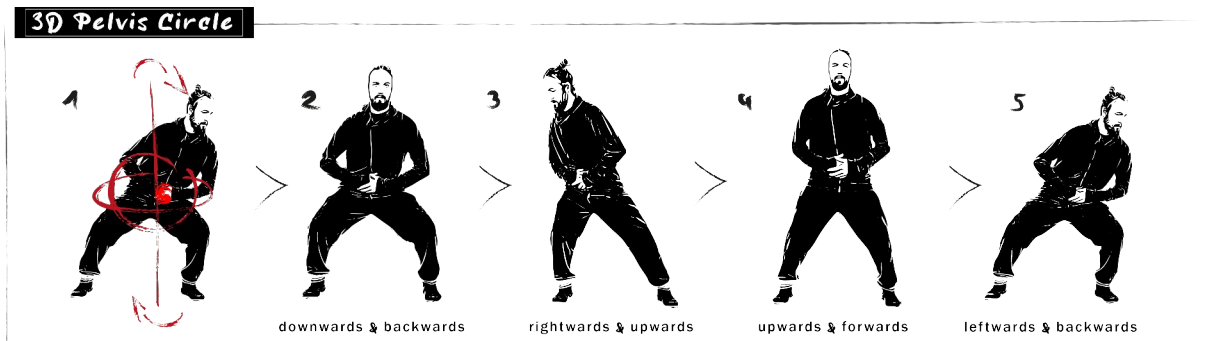
Most inner martial art motions utilize at least one plane of pelvis motion to create or redirect movement while maintaining connection. In the second stage of circling the pelvis, the student begins to combine all planes of circling into one, creating a holistic three-dimensional pelvis circle. After comprehending each circle individually, it becomes crucial in this stage to master the harmonization of all circles together. This skill enhances awareness and opens the pelvis area to the next level of usage. The harmonization of these different circle motions starts by aiming for the right timing and the ability to let all circles float continuously without interruption. The timing of the different circles with each other can vary and is applied differently in various practice motions. However, for the purpose of mastering basic harmonization, a specific timing is initially suggested, which should not be altered during the course of practice. This timing is as described visually:

Pelvis circles downwards and backwards.

Rightwards and upwards.

Upwards and forwards.

Leftwards and backwards.



Becoming proficient in this practice allows the student to achieve a more precise and controlled center motion. The full potential of center power and redirection skills can only be accessed when all planes work together harmoniously. Simultaneously, the correct usage of hip joints, sacroiliac joints, and knee joints is cultivated.

Knee Hip Joint Independence

In the process of developing the full potential of Center usage on a physical level, it is crucial to cultivate awareness of the independence of the Knee and Hip Joints. An untrained practitioner tends to involuntarily involve the Knee joints in every pelvis motion due to insufficient Hip awareness, coordination abilities, and softness. In cases where the Hip joint lacks proper coordination or is too stiff, each pelvis motion can inadvertently drag the knees into an undesired movement. This is particularly problematic in rotational motions of the pelvis, as they impose a rotational force on the knee joint. While the hip joint, being a ball joint, welcomes rotational motions, the knee joint, being a hinge joint, does not. Inadequate coordination of the hip joint can lead the knee joint to assume motions it shouldn't, causing the hip joint to lose its natural role. This, in turn, results in both joints deviating from their intended usage.

On the other side we find the ankle as well as foot position playing an equally important role. When the foot is collapsing to the inside also the knee position will be compromised. Therefore build up of a natural foot arch as well as the ability to spread the weight evenly onto the whole foot become as important as the right hip and knee coordination. #

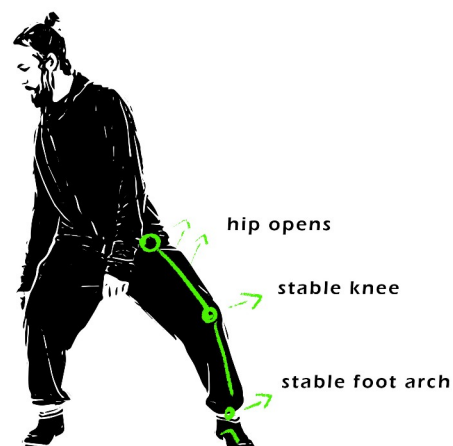
On the other hand, the ankle and foot position play an equally important role. When the foot collapses inward, the knee position is compromised. Therefore, the development of a natural foot arch and the ability to distribute weight evenly across the entire foot become as crucial as coordinating the hip and knee right.

In the example depicted in the picture, the practitioner is rotating the pelvis to the right side. By preventing the left hip joint from opening to the left (rotating out), the knee is forced into a weak, collapsing position. Over time, this position can be harmful to both the hip and knee joints. Additionally, the left foot collapses inward, failing to create a proper foot arch or stabilize the ankle to the outside, further compromising the knee position.

Weak Positioning



Correct Positioning



While this brief overview touches upon the vast topic of joint health, it emphasizes the importance of paying attention to knee-hip independence as well as the foot position in the three circles practice. This attention helps avoid long-term detrimental habits and establishes healthy habits and awareness for all inner martial art practices. Consequently, the three circles can evolve into a powerful tool for promoting lower body harmony and health in both practice and daily life.

In practical terms, during each circle motion, practitioners should ensure that the knees gently expand to the side, with toes and knees pointing in the same direction. The knees should maintain their position while the pelvis circles entirely, utilizing the hip joints and releasing tension. To achieve this, pay special attention to stabilizing the knee on the opposite side when the pelvis circles to the other side. For instance, if the pelvis circles to the right, the left knee should stabilize to the left. After practicing this for a while, it becomes important to understand how knee stabilization is highly dependent on the release of the hip joint and the positioning of the foot. When the foot arch stabilizes the ankle to the outside and the body weight is evenly spread across the entire foot, the knee will naturally stand at the right, slightly stabilized to the outside. This ensures that there are no pressure points on the inside or outside of the knee joint. Simultaneously, it is crucial to develop skill in releasing the hip joint into an inward or outward rotation. This prevents the hip muscles from pulling the knee further into a collapsing direction

