

An Explanation of Restraining, Seizing, Grasping, and Closing Within Taijiquan

Tai Ji Quan Zhong Jie Na Zhua Bi Jie

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“The most profound mysteries of Taijiquan are hardly found within the framework of the postures, Sensing Hands, Greater Rolling-Back, Dispersing Hands, saber, sword, or even staff. In every energy there is an aspect of Adhere and Stick, Neutralize and Issue—nothing too much more can actually be said. But in former times these four energies were seen in their highest aspects as Restraining, Seizing, Grasping, and Closing.¹

“Because the original principles of these were so very abstruse, it proved difficult for teachers to both transmit and train students. Consequently, up to the present day, the transmission is gradually being lost, as there is an unwillingness by teachers to part with it. The original text was not inclined toward detail and strategy, but contains some additional explanation. So, in general, it is necessary that every student is at least made knowledgeable of these.”

“If the blood vessels are restrained, the opponent’s blood will not circulate or flow. If the blood does not circulate or flow, it is as if the body is half dead.

“If the meridians are seized, it will be difficult for the opponent’s qi to move. If the qi does not move, the body will look as ridiculous as a wooden chicken.

“If the sinews are grasped, the opponent’s body will be without a commander or troops. If the body is without commander or troops, the strength is severed and dies.

“If the cavities are closed, the opponent’s vital principle will be no more. If the vital principle is no more, it will be difficult to stay alive.

“When you have achieved this kung fu from the correct practice of Sensing Hands, and your hands are able to sense the foot, inch, tenth of an inch, and ten-thousandth of an inch, you will be able to measure an opponent. When you are able to measure an opponent, you can restrain blood vessels, seize meridians, grasp sinews, and close cavities.²

“Restraining does not necessarily require measuring, as it can also be acquired through pushing.

“Seizing does not necessarily require measuring, as it can also be acquired through rubbing.

“Grasping does not necessarily require measuring, as it can also be acquired through sensing.

“Closing, however, cannot be acquired without measuring. Without measuring, you will be unable to locate the cavities, as this type of kung fu requires the foot to shrink until it becomes an inch; the tenth of an inch to shrink until it becomes a ten-thousandth of an inch, and so on.

“The human body has 108 cavities. Seventy-two of them are not fatal and thirty-six can be fatal. Yet, there are seven of these cavities which can be instantly cutoff from qi, causing death. When these seven cavities are closed, it is as though

the skin is set on fire. It is like entering a dream and receiving an awful fright. It can cause the bones to break and sinews to be torn away, or cause a violent and sudden death.

“Now, in the event you come to understand the heart of this matter, it would be as if suddenly waking up and perceiving true nature. Because Closing means to understand what is true, to know what is manifested, and to know what is the function of the spirit.

“Afterwards you will be capable of entering the apertures, as if shooting an arrow. If you can understand that to be centered means not just adjusting the inclination of one side or correcting your angle, but rather in gathering the qi and concentrating the spirit, then everything will hit the mark! This is for the most part the conditions for closing cavities. Without a reputable teacher, you will be unable to receive a transmission of these four types of kung fu—Restraining, Seizing, Grasping, and Closing.

Translator’s Notes

1. In Taijiquan, one first learns the methods of Warding-Off, Rolling-Back, Pressing, and Pushing intrinsic energies. These are then extended to the applications of Adhering, Sticking, Joining, and Following intrinsic energies. At their pinnacle, all these above intrinsic energies are distilled into what is called “Restraining, Seizing, Grasping, and Closing.” It is in this final instance that the opponent is defeated by injury to their internal functions, not just the muscles and bones in conjunction with their sense of balance. Here, it is

the blood, qi meridians, sinews, and qi cavities that are attacked to defeat the opponent.

In analogy, the use of Warding-Off and the other posture energies is like learning to shoot with a bow and arrow. In the second stage of Adhering, Sticking, Joining, and Following, it is like learning to aim and hit the target. At the highest level with Restraining, Seizing, Grasping, and Closing, it is like acquiring an unfailing pin-point accuracy.

2. Restraining means to restrain the blood vessels of an opponent.

Seizing means to seize the meridians of the opponent.

Grasping means to grasp the sinews of the opponent.

Closing means to close off the qi centers of the opponent.

“The early masters were unwilling to propagate false teachings and did not trust just anyone. They were apprehensive about transmitting their kung fu skills to others without good reason.”

—Closing verse of the *Taijiquan Classic*