

PRACTICE FOR THE MONTH

Elbows and Wrists

Taiji members be mindful when you're practicing to keep your elbows and wrists loose and empty. They should feel like there is air in your joints. Bagwa members focus on a heavy feeling in your elbows to ground you. At the same time let your wrists reach out slightly. You should feel as if your two arms are being pulled in opposite directions. the wrists should feel as if there is space between the joints.

MEDITATION

Another meditation method used in Taiji is the Basic Chi Circulation. This can be done sitting or standing. Be sure you are relaxed, comfortable, and tongue to the roof of your mouth.

Begin with the One Point meditation. Now visualize a line going down the center of your front and up your back (spinal column). Visualize your chi moving downward from the Tantien between your legs and up the back to the top of your head. From here continue it down the front to the Tantien. Another way to think of it is to imagine a stream of

water flowing from the Tantien to the base of the spine, then up to the crown of the head. Next pouring down the front and being caught in the Tantien.

As you direct the chi to the top of your head: inhalation. As it descends from the top of your head to the Tantien: exhale. Be sure to keep your shoulders relaxed. Don't work too hard on the breath, be natural and easy with your breath. If you force the breath then you can create greater problems.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I PRACTICE?

Different levels get different answers

For beginners I recommend practicing when you want to, or feel like it. Also, practice what pops into your mind. At this stage you are exploring to see if you're really interested in these arts. People start for many different reasons and the beginning sessions are to get a view of the art. The beginning class requires a different atmosphere than a continuing or advanced class. In a beginning session it's the start of building a strong foundation so, if interested, you can add more later or just continue onward.

Continuing students are treated quite differently. I have different expectations and requirements of the continuing group, as well as individual members. This also differs depending upon the class being taught. Once passed the basic/beginning class I expect you to be responsible for your own training. I'll give you the guidelines and movements but it's up to you to study or practice. (study and practice are different)

To get any skill to develop or any results from your practice I recommend working out twice a day. The first time is to practice, the second is to study and research the movements. One thing I don't see much anymore is members practicing before the classes. WHAT BETTER TIME TO PRACTICE? (In the olden days) we'd arrive early to practice and work out. We'd also practice during the class break. aside from the benefits of this extra practice it gives me the opportunity to see how your forms and skill are developing. It lets me know what I need to emphasize and what to teach next. (Even though I may be working with someone else, I do notice and make note of your practice.)

PRACTICE vs STUDY

Practice = memorization, repetition of forms

Study = dissecting and careful practice and study of the movements, research

Practice will get you to know the movements but the skill and understanding may not develop. Studying is

perfecting the movements, connections and transitions. Listening and paying attention as you practice.

The more advanced you are in the system, or the more forms you are working on, the more I will expect from you. Ideally, you should be working out daily, not merely practicing.

Once in a while I hear, "I don't remember that form, I wish we'd go through it again." If the form wasn't important enough to keep practicing then LET IT GO. Work on something you enjoy or are interested in. forms are only important in the external styles, connections are important in the Nei Jia. Once I've taught you a form, I'll check for corrections and refinements but it's your job to practice and remember it.

After learning a form from Master Gao, she would say, "Practice and study carefully so our time hasn't been wasted." You will only get results and skill from your own practice and study. As you advance, it's impossible to work on everything - everyday. Instead of practicing everything mediocre, divide things up. This is my practice schedule (aside from teaching):

SUN Bagwa
MON 1-3
TUE Chen
WED 4-6
THUR Weapons
FRI Bagwa
SAT Short forms

Don't worry about collecting forms. Work on what you have time for, or what fits into your daily schedule. Your interest should guide you toward your practice.

STUDYING HAND MOVEMENTS

The hand and arm movements are where you'll notice a big difference between Bagua, Chen and yang Taiji chuan. One point in common is that the hands are relaxed, smooth, connected with the whole movement and display softness.

Each movement, transition and posture focuses the attention on different uses of the hands and palms. You should understand what it is your hands are doing and what action is going on. This focuses your chi and jin to certain areas and begins to develop the ability to apply power and fa-jin.

The wrists should be relaxed and soft regardless of what the hands are doing. I still see members performing Single Whip with very stiff wrists. The hand should look like the fingers are holding a string with a weight on it.

As you practice your various forms I'd like you to focus on what exactly your hands and palms are doing (Bagua students this is our main focus are already). Is your hand grabbing, pushing, cutting, slicing, lifting, deflecting, or punching? The hand is your sword in the solo forms and is used as such.

What and when is your hand grabbing? Fist Under Elbow, P8unch Downward, Hit the Tiger, Pull Bow to Shoot Tiger, Pound the Mortar, or moving into various punches.

When do you focus on the fingers? Single Whip, Repulse the Monkey, Middle Cloud Hands, High Cloud Hands, Hawk, Snake Darts out Tongue, Coiling Snake, Snake Change, Double Palm Change.

When is the hollow of the palm being used? Press, Push, Repulse Monkey, High Pat the Horse, High Kick, Fair Lady works at Shuttles, Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg, Single Palm, Hands Floating on Water, Snake Postures.

When does the hand cut and slice: Stork Cools Wings, Parry, Closing, Ride the Tiger, Separation of Legs, Heel Kick, Scissors, Single Palm Change, Fall & Overturn.

The Ridge Hand strike: Thunder strike, Parting Horses Mane, Slanted Flying, Single Whip, Needle at Sea Bottom, Shooting Palm, Lion Postures.

Back Hand Energy: Ward off, cloud hands, press, deflect, closing, carry the Tiger, repulse the monkey, dragon turns head, pull down, fair lady at shuttles, snake creeps down, spinning change, tiger comes out of cave.

These are a few generalization. The emphasis may be different depending upon if you're doing Chen or Yang, or what style of Bagwa performing. Know the applications, then you can't practice incorrectly.