

FORMS - A STUDY OF OURSELVES

Forms: a choreography of martial techniques, a linked sequence of exercises, a catalogue of techniques, a moving meditation, moving relaxation exercise, moving chi kung, health exercises. These are some of the definitions of forms or sets used in the arts. They differ from dance because each movement has a function, it's not done for appearances or performances. In the internal arts, our forms and practice actually boil down to one thing: self study, self understanding, self-cultivation.

At first we begin by discovering balance, body structure, muscle connections and coordination. Next we learn and discover softness methods, mind/body relaxation, centering and chi development. From here we begin to get closer to our inner selves, our source: feelings, attitudes, habits, fears. .

Regardless of style, the forms are to be studied, not just performed or merely practiced. Even in hard styles the forms contain lessons and secrets that will be overlooked if not studied. Driving at 65 mph you can't possibly see and enjoy the scenery then same as you can at 10 mph.

Which form should I do? How many forms should I collect? Which form is better? Everyone is different so there is no easy answer. Beginners usually learn a short form. It's easy, short in movement and memorization. This gives you a foundation to learn other forms or enough of the style that you have time to practice and enjoy. Usually the longer the form the more complex and complete the form is. This is true on all levels; exercises, meditation or self-defense movements. The longer the form is, the more time necessary to study and practice it. This means that after you have learned the outer movements, you have more time in learning and discovering yourself. The more complex the form is the less careless you can perform the movements and the deeper you are forced to deal with yourself.

Practiced correctly each successive form and posture draws the mind in, closer to ourselves. The long form being an 'in-depth' study requiring more practice and more research thus greater knowledge. The advanced levels of weapons or partner exercises and forms, work even greater at this level.

The deeper you understand and study the solo forms enables you to get deeper into the advanced forms. At the same time you may discover one of the advanced forms helping you gain a greater insight than the solo forms. This usually happens with either the tuishou or one particular weapon. One set will just make more sense or be more enjoyable thus helping you break through levels other forms may not.

As you do partner work thoughts may arise like: "I don't like practicing with him, it's not enjoyable. So and so is too ruff. So and so doesn't give me any energy to work with. She makes me so mad." First of all, no one makes us mad. We get angry or we react angrily to something we don't like or are threatened by. Though practice should be enjoyable, there are also lessons and much necessary feed back as we practice the techniques.

In Aikido many students stay away from certain partners because it's difficult to do a certain technique on this individual. Actually, the technique had to be done correctly on this individual, or it had to be modified in order to work. Our first level of training is to develop listening energy (ting jin). In the solo forms this is how we feel in each movement. Are we comfortable? If not why? In the partner work we are trying to listen and blend with our partners force, movements, or strength. If our listening energy isn't correct we may clash, or we may have trouble listening to certain individuals. Anyway something isn't quite internal about it. At the same time we are refining communications skills. We have no opponents, we have partners, we are a team. The better cooperation and communication between the two of you the greater the possible result. You're not trying to beat each other, you are trying to understand and develop the internal arts. The more you help someone, the greater your skill and advancement. As a teacher, my skill is limited by how advanced the members of the club are. As you progress in skill you push me (force me) to get better and to refine my skills. It's money in the bank. If you don't invest any money you don't have any chance of getting interest back. The more you put in the greater the interest. If your partners go too fast let them know, ask them to slow down, go softer, or faster. Let them know! It not only helps you but it makes them adjust to a different level thus increasing their skill. That gives us all a greater potential to learn and listen.

As we practice, many thoughts come to our attention. (This is passed the beginning phase of being frustrated at not remembering the sequence.) These feelings still give us much to study if we permit the time and attention to them. We have an idea that everything should go on schedule or be controlled easily. If the movements don't come easy, just keep trying little by little (these will eventually become your best movements). This practice is like planting a seed and looking for the plant the next day. All things take time and each has a different timing. Remembering is the same way. If you're not used to body-movement study, it's extremely difficult at the beginning. It does get easier as time goes on. Body learning is a skill that develops as you practice. Each

class and practice is planting another seed a nurturing the ones planted.

As we practice, frustrations, tensions, fears, anxieties, relaxation, calmness, centerdness, loves, enjoyment are all brought up at some time. As we practice we can see them calmly within our practice and in greater detail. We can see, feel how they effect our bodies and well as our minds. If we continue to practice we discover methods of releasing the tension, letting go of the frustration, finding how to keep the centerdness, how to strengthen the calmness, where these feelings come from and whether to let them go or nurture them. Class and practice time is for yourself, no one else.

The above hinges upon three things: correct, mindful, and diligent practice.

DING GUNG - ZHAN ZHUANG

Ding gung translates as 'stillness/quietness work'. Zhan Zhuang translates as 'tree standing'. The most common posture of these is the Universal Post also called Embracing Arms.

This is an advanced area of chi kung and all the internal arts. The Yang Tai Chi family kept this a secret practice only taught to their family members to keep their skill above the others. It was only in the 1940's this secret crept out. The zhan zhuang is important in all internal arts not just for chi development but also in fighting ability.

In Master Tchoung's class we had to hold the postures from 20 to 40 minutes the first year as part of our chi kung warm ups. Movement chi kung serves to soften the body with movement and to focus the chi along certain meridians. The zhan zhuang serves to open the entire body (after tiring all the excess tension and muscles) to permit the chi to flow, circulate and strengthen. The strength that develops from this is Peng jin.

In order to stand for any length of time in any of the postures you have to discover correct body alignment and balance. By doing this the body structure is correct, and only after it is correct can you develop and cultivate peng jin.

If you're interested in reading more about zhan zhuang a new book is out this year. As far as I know it's the first book in English. I've seen copies of it in Mt. Vernon and Bailey Coys on Broadway in Seattle.

THE WAY OF ENERGY

by Master Lam Kam Chuen
\$14.95