

INTERNAL WUSHU ARTS NEWSLETTER

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NOT ENOUGH ROOM

With an attempted winter here, it cuts down on large spaces for us to practice. The cold or rain does curb our interest in finding an outdoor place to practice. Also, since these arts aren't for exhibition or performance we need a quiet, out of the way place to practice. In a busy area it's hard to concentrate completely and focus, so our practice quality isn't very high. (If you can practice in a crowded area without disturbing your concentration, let me know your secret).

Each session and each place gives us different restrictions on and what we can practice. Everything has a season. With this attitude you can take advantage of different training methods for different seasons. With nice weather in spring and summer it's ideal to work on large forms or weaponry, so take advantage of it. In winter take advantage of the small spaces and work on your seated or standing meditations, chi kung, basic drills and exercises. Use your space and time to your advantage.

PA KUA - Standing warm ups, Zhan Zhuang, stationery inner palms, small changes, basic weapon exercises if room permits.

TAI CHI - Chi kung, Zhan Zhuang, 4' Tai Chi, basic drills.

The chi kung is the most important basics we have and they don't need much room. Use the winter to concentrate on these so when spring and summer comes you can hit the ground running.

PERSPECTIVE

You hear me say enough times: relax, more peng jin, loosen up, you're trying too hard etc. I'm sure you can hear me say a few

of these things even in your sleep. It seems one sided, doesn't it? Even though its been about 2 years since master Gao left I thought I'd share her complaints about my practice. I can still hear her saying:

You're too tense, sung-always sung.

You're arms are too straight, keep them curved.

All movements must be rounded.

Hollow your chest.

Why are you so stiff?

More waist in your movements, not hips.

It's easy, you make it too hard.

A CHALLENGE

Master Tung Ying Chieh emphasized that during each practice we should go through any particular form not once, but three times. The first time is to limber up and is used as preparation, by the third session your concentration and quality is at its best thus you're getting the most from your practice. This turns our practice time into a workout and a study period. The visiting Chen Tai Chi master claims he practices the Chen long form 10 times in a row, 24 times when he has the time (this should take most of the day!). If you read any of the family histories of the Yang and Chen family this was how they would normally practice. It would be nice to have

life so simple we'd have that much time and interest for our own practice.

My challenge is from me to you, and from you to yourself for the next week, if not longer. Try to practice either the short form, section 1 or any form at least three times in a row-each day. This will definitely push your Tai Chi or Pa Kua to a better level, see what happens.

Instructors teaching is not practicing! When teaching we get great benefits from going through the forms but our concentration is on 50-70% on the form. The same usually holds true when you do group Tai Chi, your mind is partly concerned with those around you. Our goal is for 100% concentration and focus on our own practice and the feelings taking place. So, those teaching, this does not include your practice when teaching.

A young man came to a great sword fighter and asked to study the art of sword fighting. After he was accepted as a student he asked how long it would take him to become a great sword fighter. The master answered 10 years. The student then asked what if he practice very, very hard. The answer this time was 20 years. The student was perplexed and asked why the extra effort took longer for skill to develop. The master explained that with one eye looking toward the goal, only one eye is left to focus on the present, thus it takes twice as long.

ADVANCEMENT IN PA KUA CHANG

The most important beginning lesson and training you get when starting Pa Kua is, of course, walking the circle.

This serves to strengthen the legs, focus the mind, learn to sink the chi downward, and develop a unity of mind and body. This training and practice is very difficult. You have to focus on your balance, your stepping, body alignment, in addition to the basic movement. The most difficult part of it all is just walking the circle correctly. If you're in the correct posture the legs get quite a workout. As a beginner this is the hardest part of learning Pa Kua. The hand and arm movements are a little difficult to do smoothly but they don't really compare to the footwork. Even knowing the movements and changes doesn't make it any easier, most likely they make the walking harder since there is turning and twisting.

You may not believe it, but walking the circle is time to rest, center and relax as you advance. Instead of using energy, it becomes a time to store energy and rest. This all depends on whether you've learned and practiced the basics

correctly and diligently as a beginner. At first (beginning) walking in a low stance is a great effort, eventually it will become a nice comfortable stretch.

As we advance in the system the forms, stepping and body requirements do become more difficult, if you can imagine it. The Pa Kua seven star short staff is a very long form and a really strenuous workout. When you get to the circle walk in this form it's time to rest for the next burst of effort.

Aside from the various forms, the level you practice each form also changes. Take the inner palms for example. First, we learn and practice them slowly and carefully. Once you have them memorized you should practice them at a normal to fast pace, start your practice going through them slowly to warm-up but the second time through they should be done quickly and smoothly.

Train, practice and walk the circle now, correctly, so that later you can use it to rest.

There are many styles of chi kung, many are very similar, some seem contradictory to each other. Chi kung translated means energy work. This can encompass anything from seated meditation, healing techniques, magical powers, or martial applications. In the internal arts as in most chi kung, relaxation is a requirement for the chi kung. The exception to this is the external styles where dynamic tension is often used. Though most movements may focus on smoothness some styles use brisk quick and forceful actions.

If we practice Tai Chi, Pa Kua or Hsing I correctly we are practicing chi kung; but chi kung by itself doesn't include the internal martial arts. It's the chi kung however, that gives the internal arts the health benefits and the power used in applications. Actually we can't mention the internal arts without including chi kung.

Relaxation
Focused attention
Breathing methods
Energy cultivation

These are all required for chi kung work. Some chi kung just works on seated or standing meditation methods in order to calm the mind, to still, center, or circulate the chi. Some of these use visualizations for healing, to strengthen various organs, or to open up psychic centers. Some use movements in order to achieve the same purpose. The movements may focus on one area of the body to stimulate a certain meridian in order to effect the corresponding organ, or to draw the chi to that area. Some methods may focus the chi into the hands prior to massage or healing work.

For healing or increasing the circulation of the chi; relaxation is a priority along with focusing the I (intent). Chi kung is originally, and primarily, a method of health and healing. The martial arts have adopted them due to the benefits of the energy and power they develop. Pa Kua is perhaps one exception since it was developed from a Taoist chi kung sect. The internal arts however, are an expansion of the chi kung arts. The difference here is that all movements have a martial application and purpose to them.

Though chi kung emphasizes becoming healthier and stronger the intent isn't using strength or power outwardly as in the internal arts, just getting healthier. Everything we do in the nei jia should be structurally sound, as if we were applying power or strength or receiving it.

Some forms of chi kung are primarily focused upon gaining power for applications. hard styles lean in this direction primarily. Iron shirt chi kung has several branches, some external some internal, the main purpose of these arts is to become invulnerable to strikes. At the other side of the spectrum you have the seated chi kung methods that seek to achieve enlightenment.

Chi kung, like anything else, has many diverse schools and styles. They all share requiring the breath and mind to be harmonized and focused. Internal arts also emphasize being relaxed, beyond this the field is open to many methods and purposes.