

Bagua: What's Important?

I've had the fortune to be exposed to and study various versions of the Cheng Ting-Hua Bagua system/systems. I feel lucky since all my teachers were real, meaning from the old traditions. Also, having different teachers has given me a greater perspective of the art since each teacher thought they had a truth. Comments like, "this is the oldest 8 changes," or "this is what Tung Hai Chuan really taught when he was young." Or "this is the true *Tang Ni Bu* - treading mud step."

After studying from each teacher it became clearer and clearer that the various sub-styles were actually very similar and the differences were minor. Outwardly they may appear different but the energies were very much the same.

It doesn't matter what system you study as long as you train the system, not merely the forms. Let's face it, we'll never really know what Tung Hai Quan taught since it's been colored by several generations of masters. I'm not saying this is a bad thing, just real.

The good thing about learning different methods is, as I said, I see many things that are really the same. This has led me to look at the art and think about what is really important and what may be 'extra' or added. As I also look at the differences between the different styles, it's the differences that don't seem important or merely a stylized part of the

art. Some of this is also understanding the principles of practice.

Take for instance the walking method. Classical writings mention all of them: treading mud step, scissor step, snake step, lion step, crane (camel) step. And with each of these each teacher had the 'real' way to do it. "The foot never leaves the ground!" "Always place the foot flat!" "Never place the foot flat!"

As I practiced each method, each trained my body, balance, and strength differently. Each was good yet different. This had led me to think that training in only one style limits our potential and freedom of movement. It is important to train in each for a length of time instead of merely switching from one to the other.

The same holds true for the single palm changes. Some are simple, some work the body more, but each emphasize the most important aspect of Bagua Zhang: rise-drill-fall-overturn. Which also have different names depending on the system putting different emphasis on the same movements.

All in all the most important things to practice:

1. Walking the wuji (any walking method).
2. Train the inner palms, don't just do them.
3. Work the single palms or the first three: single palm, flowing palm, double palm.

Slow is important but so is quickness. The rest is extra.



Discipline! *strength of character*

These arts have become so trendy and entertaining that the original purpose, sincerity, and benefits have become very watered down.

Aiki Soke Don Angier use to say, "you must have the same dedication as a concert pianist if you want to attain skill." Early on we used to talk about training in the arts. This wasn't just a tough workout but mind, body, energy training. That was the focus instead of the results of the physical practice. Zen in motion, it's not easy.

First of all there is the discipline of getting to class and not skipping classes just because you don't feel like it. Especially the morning classes.

Next comes the discipline to practice on your own daily. It requires quite a commitment and sincerity to the art and yourself not to skip your daily practice. It's not just practicing a form or two but taking a form and really studying it for 1/2 hr. Perhaps do a 10 minute warm-up going through the movements but then really pay attention to what you should be learning from the form.

The real discipline is training. This means continual practice with no gaps or rests. It can start with as little as 15 minutes. But in that time keep your mind from wandering, take the exercises or movements and then refer the core principles that we should be practicing as we do these forms. Not rushing through them.

Keep in mind the more form you're trying to work on, the slower you'll achieve your goal and skill level. If you're learning two or three different arts, even though they may be internal, it's like you're trying to learn to play the piano, flute, and guitar at the same time. Yes, they're all musical instruments but each has its own uniqueness and requirements. Your practice and energy is dispersed. If all you want is some exercise then it's fine. If you're hoping for skill then it's like two steps forward, one step back as you shift arts.

Discipline isn't easy. Especially nowadays with multi-tasking and so much to do. The discipline is to simplify. And . . . usually when we simplify we get bored. That is part of the training of character. How many times do you practice section 1 or the 8 changes during one session? Master Feng said he'd do the long form 7 times before his lesson with his teacher. You'll find most of the current top masters do the same.

Discipline may just be doing one art! Discipline may be taking one drill from the form and working it for an hour. The results are awesome. Discipline isn't having someone force you to practice or train. External force isn't discipline.



The Internal Arts

FROM THE GROUND UP!

Starting fall 2008 I will be teaching various sessions from the ground up. Starting at the beginning level and onward. Yang & Chen Taiji, and Bagua.

Starting out we will focus on the warm-ups and basics which are a core to the art. From there we will proceed to the basic drills that are important to



a good foundation. The next step is to proceed onto the solo forms. We will progress through the forms working on repetitions of the various movements as well as partner work associated with the form. This is a great time for beginners to start and for those interested in instructor certification.

Interested? Sign-up for the sessions.

SEPTEMBER 2008

Yang Taiji Quan: Mondays 4:30-6:00 Dale sifu
 1/2 hr warm ups
 1/2 hr basics
 1/2 hr form work

Chen Taiji Quan: Saturdays 9-10:30 Dale sifu
 1/2 hr basics
 1/2 hr partner work
 1/2 hr form work

Bagua Zhang: Thursdays 6-7:30 Dale sifu
 1/2 hr warm-ups
 1/2 hr Inner Palms
 1/2 hr 8 Changes

Intermediate: Mondays 6-7:30 Dale sifu - **class full**
 Sanshou 7&8 partner form

Bandon!

August
 15-16,17th

Play
 Practice
 Train
 Vacation

Family friendly
 retreat and
 workshops.

Autumn 2008

SCHEDULE		MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	SATURDAY
	9:00 - 10:00 am		Bagua Joel	Yang Taiji		Chen Taiji
	10:00 - 11:00 am					
	11:00 - 12:00 pm					Advanced
	4:30 - 6:00 pm	Yang Taiji				
	6:00 - 7:00 pm	Andy's sanshou class 6:00-7:30	Yang Taiji Quan Don & Bruce	Aikido Burk sensei	Bagua Basics	
	7:00 - 8:00 pm	Bruce & Joel's class			Changes	
	8:00 - 9:00 pm				Advanced	



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What Are You Learning?

Who are you learning from?

As a beginner, all you know is that you are learning a form, a style, movements.

The actual truth in traditional arts is that you are learning principles of self. These forms, exercises and movements are eventually a mirror, looking at yourself.

Many practitioners really miss this part of the art. This is the art! You learn from a teacher, someone who has greater experience than you to learn the movements. You refine the physical movements to get them right and look good. This isn't the art however, it's the next step that is the art.

What are you learning? What are you learning as you practice the forms? Do you understand? As I lead a form or class it's apparent to me that most members think the form is just

an exercise. The forms are our actual teachers. When thought through deeper we are the teachers, each of us as we practice if we practice mindfully.

You shouldn't just go through the forms but study them, learn from them.

Questions like "Oh, I'm so stiff." "This feels awkward," "I hate this part," should start you to focus on what's wrong, where am I working too hard, where am I ignoring the basic principles?

As I continue to practice it amazes me how much I need to learn. How much I don't know. How much each practice session is different from the previous. "Wow I'm tense today." "Oh, this is wonderful." "My legs are stiff today." "Where are the bows, curves, or sinking."

This gives me something to focus on and refine something that is becoming rote or mindless.

All in all, the forms should be our private time to check in with ourselves. A time to reflect and re-set our center to our core. A time to visit our health plan both mental and physical.

Questions: Are you rushing through the form to finish it? Are you less soft or flexible than last practice? Are you able to let go and enjoy your practice? Is your practice an oasis from the rest of your day or is it another job to do?

It's all about YOU! Improve your health, improve your relaxation, improve your life. Don't do something because you think it'll help. Do it because you want to and know it'll help!

