

# Using Proper Mind Participation in Your Practice

by F. Hriadil

In today's "modern approach" to fitness and health, there is a major focus on technology and the entertainment of the mind while performing the training. People exercise in front of the TV or video player; while listening to music, the radio, or MP3 players; while thinking about their lives, jobs, or acquaintances; etc. - almost anything to take their minds off of their exercises. These external stimuli, or distractions, not only have the effect of taking the mind "off of" the exercises, but more significantly, they take the mind "out of" the exercises. There is little or no recognition of the role of mind participation. In many current exercise practices, the mind is essentially "disconnected" from the practice.

This is contrary to the ancient "traditional approach" of the internal martial or health arts that has evolved over many centuries of human study and development. Here, it is recognized that there is an important connection between the mind and body that must not be ignored. The active and focused participation of the mind is considered to be a significant and necessary element in any skilled exercise practice. It forms a fundamental aspect of the training methodology comprising such internal arts as the traditional Ba Gua Zhang of Lu Shui-Tian as taught by Master Bok-Nam Park.

Master Park often reminds students of the important role that proper mental focus and imagery plays in their training. He teaches that it must be present in every exercise in order to ensure good quality because "without good quality there can be no good progress." Just going through the physical motions or movements is not enough to achieve good results. Without proper mind participation, the body will not perform completely or correctly.

Consider Ba Gua Zhang self-defense exercises such as palm striking exercises, stepping exercises, combinations exercises, etc. If you do not utilize serious intent and use realistic mental imagery in which you imagine that you are facing a real opponent who is determined to injure you, the body will not fully respond in the exercise. If there is no feeling that the situation is serious, and if the mind and body do not fully participate in the exercise, the training will not be very focused or very effective.

Students need to use their minds and imaginations to add a sense of gravity to their self-defense exercises. As a way of emphasizing this when practicing Ba Gua's Single Palm or Double Palm strike Fajing (Shooting Out Power) training, for example, Master Park tells his students to imagine that there is a huge, ferocious bear standing in front of them, ready to kill them. He tells them to imagine that they have only one chance to strike the bear to kill it. That, they must strike with their full power because nothing less will suffice against an animal of that size. And that, they must try to kill the bear with each strike that they throw. A simple but clear image of danger is used to evoke a strong response from the body. This is the type of focus and intensity that is necessary for the student to make good progress in developing Fajing power.

Students need to use their minds and imaginations to add life and intent to their sequence and movement practices. Every movement method and every hand method has a purpose. The mind must be fully engaged in each exercise to elicit the proper body and Qi responses. Master Park refers to practitioners who "just go through the motions" or practice with little or no intent as having "dead crab" hands - meaning no focus, no vitality, and



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no Qi. Serious intent is necessary for the student to make good progress in Qi development, utilization, and control.



Students need to use their minds and imaginations to add the proper imagery to their Qi Gong Meditation health practices. The proper imagery evokes a serene mental and emotional state. This calms the mind, relieves tension, and relaxes the body - enabling Qi to flow fully and deeply. In the traditional Ba Gua Zhang of Master Park, the focus is on natural principles and the mental images that are utilized in meditation, for example, are simple ones taken from nature and the natural world.

There is literally no aspect of traditional Ba Gua Zhang where the active and focused participation of the mind does not play a significant role. The mind-body connection is a critical component to rapid progress. It does not matter if the practice is health or self-defense related. The synergy that occurs between the mind and body must be developed, cultivated, and enhanced. The more focused the mind, and the more connected the mental imagery is to the exercise, the more completely the body will perform. And, the more powerful and beneficial will be the results.

This may sound obvious to some. But, being “obvious” does not diminish its importance, nor does it make it an automatic occurrence with students as they train. The proper incorporation of the mind too often becomes “lost” in the physical exertions or complexity of an exercise (which is remedied through continued repetitive practice), or “forgotten” among the various distractions present in the training environment (which is remedied by a strong mind, dedication, and self-discipline). In either case, obvious or not, it is necessary for one to always remember that it takes serious intent to get serious performance from the body and it takes serious performance to make serious progress.