

Principles and Fundamentals of Ba Gua Zhang (Pa Kua Chang) - The Focus of Master Bok-Nam Park -

by Dan Miller

This is an adaptation and re-editing of the article "Bok-Nam Park Emphasizes the Fundamental Principles of Pa Kua" by Dan Miller that originally appeared in the PA KUA CHANG JOURNAL - Vol. 1, No. 5; Jul/Aug 1991. The Journal was published by High View Publications. It is no longer being produced; however, all back issues are currently available on CD-ROM.

"History does not make progress, students need to learn principles" - this was Master Bok-Nam Park's response when I first approached him in 1991 to be interviewed for the Pa Kua Chang newsletter/journal. He continued saying that martial arts publications print too much on history, stories, mythology, generalized information, and abstract theory when what students really need are detailed explanations of principles and fundamentals. If students do not understand the principles and the fundamentals, they will not progress.

"Respect for parents is good; but, when the baby is hungry, he does not want to know who his father is and who his grandfather is - what he wants is food. After his belly is full, then you can tell him about his ancestors." Ba Gua Zhang Stepping, Sparring, Qi Circulation, Qi Development, Meditation, Breathing, Palm Methods, coordinating the Body with the Stepping, combining Speed and Balance with Qi, developing Power, etc. - all are suitable topics for detailed discussion which are much more important to skill and understanding than such things as history.

It has been Master Park's experience that students generally know that Ba Gua Zhang practitioners "Walk the Circle", practice Eight "Mother Palms", and practice a variety of Stepping Patterns. Nevertheless, not many students know why these things are done, how they are specifically applied to self-defense or Qi Gong (Chi Kung) practice, and how they relate to the fundamental natural principles of the Yi Jing (I-Ching), the Wu Xing (Wu Hsing or Five Elements), and Yin and Yang. He finds that when Ba Gua students are asked why they walk a circle or how each of the "Mother Palms" is used specifically, most are not able to give an explanation that displays any depth of understanding.



When discussing his traditional Ba Gua Zhang training method, Master Park often compares teaching a beginning student to taking a family sedan and transforming it into a finely tuned, high performance race car. In his approach, the new student does not learn any Ba Gua Zhang forms or Circle Walking methods right away because they are simply analogous to the body of the car. Master Park sees no sense in building a car body before the engine is able to reach a high level of performance.

The "engine" of Ba Gua Zhang is built on natural principles and sound fundamentals which are based on those principles. Each component and sub-component of the "engine" must first be developed and perfected on its own. Then, they must all be connected and balanced properly to form the complete system - a perfect equation which will provide superior health and self-defense.

The fundamental components of the Ba Gua Zhang equation include such elements as Speed, Power, Balance, Flexibility, Qi Circulation, and Qi Development. While every martial artist would likely acknowledge that all of these elements together provide high martial skill, Master Park's traditional method focuses first on developing strong fundamentals in each of these areas individually. Each element is explained in detail and the Ba Gua

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Zhang student is taught how to work each fundamental separately - until it can be performed efficiently, effectively, and reflexively. When a sufficient level of performance has been achieved in each area, the elements are combined, integrated, and balanced to lead the practitioner to the highest levels of skill that are possible.

Taking Speed for example, Master Park teaches that in order to obtain good speed, the student must first develop a relaxed and flexible body, as well as good balance. Additionally, the student must learn how to circulate Qi rapidly. Master Park explained that he is not just referring to External Qi (Wai Qi) here. External Qi movement is not difficult to do. Master Park says he can take any student and teach them how to feel Wai Qi in one lesson. What is much more difficult to do is teach the student how to feel, circulate, and direct Internal Qi (Nei Qi), and to do so effectively, reflexively, and spontaneously.

In Master Park's traditional Ba Gua Zhang method, students are taught specifically how to develop relaxation, flexibility, balance, and rapid Qi circulation in order to increase speed. Furthermore, and more importantly, they are also taught how to integrate these fundamental elements while optimizing the use of angles in conjunction with stepping and body movement. Master Park says that when a student learns how to move efficiently with no wasted movement through an understanding of the natural principles, speed will increase naturally.



Like his teacher, Lu Shui-Tian, Master Park prefers to teach through the use of analogy. He explained that when the Wright Brothers built the first airplane, it flew successfully but didn't fly very far. Though these first efforts were called "flying" at the time, they are trivial when compared to aviation today. To evolve from the Wright Brothers craft to something like the current Space Shuttle, engineers had to research and develop each and every component of the aircraft individually and then bring them all together into a fine working balance. Master Park views Ba Gua Zhang training in the exact same manner.

All students of Master Park's traditional method are taught by prescription. In general, students are taught one-on-one, and each new student is given a personal training program geared towards his or her individual needs. The first thing that occurs is that the student's general health and condition are determined to ascertain if there are any specific problems or imbalances that need to be taken into account. The student's overall coordination and strength are also assessed. The student is then put on a personal training program, involving health building exercises, breathing exercises, meditation practice, and self-defense practice, which is designed to strengthen weak areas, bring the body into overall harmony, and develop superior fighting skill.

A balanced training approach is applied in Master Park's traditional Ba Gua Zhang method that is based on universal natural principles. The focus is on learning and mastering the fundamentals which derive from these natural principles, not on studying history, or simply doing forms, or just walking the circle. It has been Master Park's experience that this is the only sure way a student can make true progress, and achieve the goal of superior health and devastating self-defense skill.

Adapted and re-edited by F. Hriadil