

1. RELAXATION AND SLOWNESS

In Internal Boxing the beginning step is to gain a foothold (zhan zhuang). To take a standing posture in which the novice may quiet his nerves and relax and soften his muscles. This phase is largely mental, almost spiritual, and says that the mind can will relaxation and softness. As you stand, you practice this willing of the tranquil flow from your eyebrows to the soles of your feet. Your mind thus travels this imagined route. With practice and concentration all distracting thoughts will be shut out, your nerve-ends sharpened but at ease, and your whole being peaceful and sublimated. Thus your mind is liberated, and, when this happens, your body and limbs will attain a happy, unencumbered circulation of air and blood.

Zhan zhuang is literally a maneuvering of the mind for gaining a static outside and a dynamic inside. An old saying, "To stand still results in the mind's settlement, mind settlement in tranquility, tranquility in a sense of security, security in wholesome thinking, and wholesome thinking in great accomplishments." Ancients followed this philosophy to cultivate their bodies as well as their minds.

The word slowness refers not only to action but also to a state of mind free from any impatience and anxiety. Haste seldom solves anything. Slowness therefore is needed to alleviate the tense desire for progress and success. Slowness harmonized the outside and inside influences. By beginning slowly the novice will have sufficient time to seek, listen to, feel for, and apprehend the quintessence of boxing and to adjust his body limbs to test the reactions from the various muscles. This will increase his potential as a novice boxer.

These are secrets of the Internal system. Traditionally, secrets are not disclosed casually. So called secrets are not really very secret. Most secrets lie in what occurs in our everyday life, in our being most natural. Because they are posited on an ordinary base, they are usually ignored. Internal Boxing does not.

2. THE MIND (yi)

The mind in Chinese is usually synonymous with the heart (xin). According to Chinese psychology, the mind dominates all actions. Internal Boxing insists that three things are coordinated: "The mind commands, strength (li) goes along, and vital energy (qi) follows." consciously or subconsciously all physical functions are directed by the mind. Training the mind slowly enables one to transform internal truths into external boxing forms. But it must be done slowly. If a beginner lays too much stress on physical performance, he will fall short. How important the concept of mind is to boxing may be seen in the very names of the three internal systems: Taiji (Grand Ultimate), Xing Yi (Form of Mind), and Bagua (Eight diagrams), all suggesting thought and action in unison.

3. BREATHING

During practice the novice invariably pants and has difficulty breathing. Internal Boxing will overcome this by teaching you to 'sink' your breath to your navel, which will permit you to breathe normally even in the midst of strenuous movement. Practice itself will harmonize action and breathing. One sees this in almost any sport - - from swimming to track. To adjust one's breathing is to regularize it in time to slow or fast movement. While eating, without being conscious of it, we continually adjust our breathing. The novice should not fuss about breathing: gradually and naturally it will take care of itself. The Internal stresses naturalness and often uses the analogy of a child. Watch how a child breathes and then do likewise.

4. THE USE OF STRENGTH

Some boxing masters have said that it is not right to use strength, nor is it right not to use strength. This seeming paradox may be explained in this way. The central idea is how to use your strength at a given time. A novice thinks that the increase of strength depends on the use of strength -- that is, you cannot lift a heavy weight without using strength. Correct, but strength and the function of strength are different things. The strength of the so called muscle man is entirely different from the strength of Internal Boxing. Our strength is reserved inside and evenly distributed. It is always living and highly volatile. When held in reserve it gives one a high-spirited appearance and when released it fairly radiates. This kind of strength means much more than the kind employed to lift a weight or to hurt an enemy.

It is easier for a weak person or one who knows nothing of boxing to learn the Internal methods. Such a person is not pre-occupied with past instruction and has no reservation on the advice given. He merely goes ahead and follows it. Boxing masters instruct their students to learn boxing by following the three requirements mentioned above: slowness, softness, evenness. With these mastered. A promising embryo for learning Internal Boxing is formed.

5. SUBSTANCE AND FUNCTION

To eradicate erroneous ideas you may have, I desire to draw a comparison between the Internal and External types of boxing. Based on an analysis of substance and function there is a remarkable difference between the two arts. The Internal is based on the combined training of spirit and body, exemplified in the doctrines of Buddhism and Taoism. The main goal of these doctrines is to achieve the state of holding a 'great air' without any worldly desire or bellicose attitude, neither humble nor arrogant, always advancing and indomitable. "spiritual" cultivation in the Internal boxing is given top priority, but boxing theory and practice must also be accorded their due. When you box, the 'spiritual' cultivation is transformed into physical activity in exactly the right proportions required for the work at hand.

External Boxing, on the other hand, stresses the physical or material side. It stresses external muscle size and achievement and pragmatic postures. It likes the flamboyant display, the demonstration of strength. Visually, the two appear similar to the layman, whereas, actually, they are quite remote from each other. First, muscle training in the external Boxing is restricted by age, whereas the mental cultivation of the internal boxing continues through life and, if anything, becomes more profound at an advanced age. Undeniably the use of a single part of the body in external boxing is often admirable. But hits requires time, effort, and strength, and the gain made often leaves other parts of the body defenseless. The strength of internal boxing, however, is hidden inside and permeates everywhere in equal proportions. Reserved inside, it is virtually inexhaustible and can be gathered for use. Permeating the whole body, the strength of the internal is not localized and can shoot forth from any quarter. It can be hard or soft, cover a wide area or a small spot, and be drawn for use externally or reserved inside.

In actual boxing there are many other differences between the two in respect to principles and methods. The internal studies the theory of change, and the interplay of yin/yang, and how to win by wisdom rather than tricks. Its desire is to win without a hot fight (economically), but to win so that no doubt lingers in the mind of the attacker (efficiently). An internal boxing master can dodge, deflect, and counterattack instinctively because the mental training has made him both efficient and economical.

An ancient boxing classic states: "Boxing is like taking a walk; striking an enemy is like snapping your fingers." The external cares only for demonstrable skills, whereas the internal reserves and does not demonstrate its skill, which, if anything, have been more scientifically developed than those of the external. In sum, the substance and function of the two systems are entirely different. The substance of Internal boxing is on the mental, not the material, boxing. It brings health with it and, therefore, can be said to teaching fighting and living skills at the same time.

6. CONCEPTS NEEDED FOR TRAINING

The novice needs of the firm will and perfect confidence to understand and appreciate the function of internal boxing. He must be prepared himself mentally and must have the correct concepts in mind. A beginner is like a man going on a trip. If you want to reach his destination quickly and safely, he will select the best means and the shortest route.

The ideal thing is one of middle age, as he accumulates knowledge and experience as he matures. Confucius said, the person at 40 will not be diverted. His originally referred to ethical cultivation, but can be applied to any kind of learning. When young, a person tends to show all spring, but when he is old his strength will fail him. Then he knows more about what he had earlier was superficial and of no use. Guilt and regret then impel him to learn the art from the start. The person with such an awakening is very likely to progress rapidly. He now is quiet and receptive and his psychology is correct. He turns his personal and sensual desire to the spiritual side. He then assesses things properly and is always calm. Then he starts learning. Internal boxing doctrine says that wuwei is required. Wuwei is to become like a blank piece of paper. Every internal student tries to achieve this. It brings harmony to one's life. This process, however, requires time and energy.

Wrong ideas can put the student on the wrong track, examples are numerous. Some divide the internal into hard, soft, and change, equating the hard to Xing Yi, the soft of Taiji, and the change to Bagua. Some also say that Xing Yi is for the youngsters, Bagua for the middle aged, and Taiji for the oldsters. How absurd! Internal experts use to say that the three have the same end, yet employ different means. This statement must not be interpreted as a relay race but rather like three links in a chain of command to attain an end. From Xing Yi, you can learn the physical aspects of the internal function. From Taiji and Bagua you can reach the spiritual phenomenon of internal boxing. The relay race analogy was taught by some quack boxers. If you believe it you will never enter the gate of internal boxing even if you practice all your life.

To go further, the three arts suggest a correct basis for learning boxing. They stress intent. From intent, action comes and is dominated. The idea is to keep still although your body moves. That is I. To remain still although the body turns circularly; that is Bagua, and to do so while the body goes in a straight line: that is Xing Yi. The idea is formed, and if you want to move, you do; if you want to stay still, you do. If you want to be hard or soft, you will do it. This emptied aspect brings transformation. Any of the three arts can bring it. Also, all three can at different times be hard or soft. It is entirely wrong to say that one is soft and the other is hard. Soft and hard in boxing are transitional phases.

To learn the internal, the spirit must dominate the body. At first adopt wuwei and wuwei (forgetting self). This is the spiritual construction of a foundation. Then accept these basic but radical ideas:

- Boxing requires movement but first the internal requires stillness
- To defeat the enemy requires strength, but first the internal requires softness
- Fighting requires speed, but first the internal requires slowness

If a person desires to learn internal boxing with the maximum speed and the greatest efficiency, he has to heed all the above. To achieve the apex of boxing these three basic ideas are the best transport for your voyage. If a boxer cannot accept these ideas he is not qualified to learn internal boxing. Thus internal boxers put students into categories.

- TO KNOW FIRST, TO ACT SECOND which means that before you act you learn step by step and with great deliberation. With this temperament, it is easy for such a student to learn internal boxing. When he learns one technique he can develop it to 10. Even with no teacher the achievement of such students will be great and they can attain their goal.
- TO ACT WITHOUT KNOWING these students learn everything the teacher shows by rote, mechanically, without asking how or why. Their achievement will not be great.

7. A FINAL WORD

For your body to accept the gift of this art it must not only be disciplined but also must literally be remade. By endeavoring to subtract the antagonisms, spasms, and clumsy habits accumulated since birth, we are able to achieve a 'pre-birth', a natural body. This is a body capable of being molded correctly. It involves initially relaxation and softness, from which later spring true hardness. Do the exercises slowly so as to enhance feeling. Think and feel mightily as you do the movements. Pause at the end of the movements, inaction often aids relaxation. The more you relax in the first phase, the more strength you will have in the second.