

## **A Note From *Pa Kua Chang Journal* Editor Dan Miller**

Welcome to the CD-ROM compilation of all 38 issues of the *Pa Kua Chang Journal*! Since February 1997, when I stopped publishing the *Journal*, many new practitioners have come to the art that may not have had the opportunity to view the material on Ba Gua Zhang that was printed in the *Journal*. Over the past few years several Ba Gua Zhang instructors and practitioners have encouraged me to make this information available once again. I could not afford to reprint these issues, so the CD-ROM format seemed to me to be the perfect solution. The release of this CD-ROM also gives me the opportunity to update readers on changes I have made over the past six years regarding my perspective on Ba Gua Zhang and so I hope that you will take a few minutes to read what I have written below.

During the seven years (1990-1997) I spent publishing this *Journal* I was completely consumed with the research, study, and practice of Ba Gua Zhang. During that time I made six extended trips to Asia—visiting mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong—specifically to research this art. In total, I conducted in-depth multi-part interviews with over 75 Ba Gua Zhang teachers throughout Asia and the United States. Additionally, I had over 50 magazine articles and dozens of books on Ba Gua Zhang, which were written in Chinese, translated into English. This research, and my own practice and study of the art, formed the base of my knowledge and the resultant opinions I expressed in the *Journal* regarding Ba Gua Zhang.

Many of my personal opinions regarding Ba Gua Zhang were conveyed to readers in a series of editorials which ran in various issues. These articles related to topics such as the definition of Ba Gua Zhang, what comprised complete systems of Ba Gua Zhang, and how Ba Gua Zhang was practiced and trained in the old tradition. Many years have passed since I wrote those articles and many of the ideas I previously held about the study and practice of Ba Gua Zhang have changed and/or deepened over those years. Thirteen years have passed since I published the first issue of the *Pa Kua Chang Journal* and six years have passed since I published the final issue. I learned a lot about Ba Gua during the seven years I spent publishing the *Journal*, yet I have probably learned even more in the years since the last issue was published.

Let me use some philosophy from the *ba gua* (eight trigrams) to try and help explain my evolution of learning in Ba Gua Zhang over the past twenty years: the philosophy inherent in Ba Gua Zhang is a model for (among numerous other things) the cyclical nature of naturally occurring phenomenon. For instance, in relating the *King Wen* (later heaven) arrangement of the *ba gua* to the cycle of seasons in nature we find that Spring can represent the initiation of an idea and the nurturing of that idea, Summer can represent that idea coming to fruition, Fall can represent reaping the benefits of the growth and maturation that has occurred in the Spring and Summer, and the Winter can represent an inward reflection and contemplative atonement of that which was grown, matured, and cultivated. Winter is most often related to digestion, stillness, rest, and inward processing.

While I was publishing the *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, I spent seven years in the intense mode of gathering, collecting, and disseminating information. Everything that I gathered was quickly digested and either written about in the *Journal*, written about in a book I was writing or editing, and/or taught to my students. After writing on one topic, I would then move quickly on to gather the next bit of information so that I could have something new to print in the next issue or book. I felt as though the cycles of learning that I was involved in during that seven-year period were a bit lop-sided as they consisted of a long Spring (making contacts, formulat-

ing ideas, and processing new information), a shortened Summer (lack of time necessary for the ideas, information, and relationships to mature and flower), a long Fall (gathering, collecting, and “harvesting” the less-than-ripened information) and then a very brief Winter (no time for deep reflection before the next group of ideas were formed). While I feel the information I reported was accurate and true, I also feel that my internal processing of the information, as it would relate to my own personal practice and advancement in the art, was out of balance to some degree.

In other words, I collected and processed a lot of information during the years I published the *Journal*, but I did not allow sufficient time for that information to mature during the “summer months” and I did not have any time to let that information settle during the “winter months” so that I could understand it on a deeper and more contemplative level. Every other month I had a new issue of the *Journal* to put out and so I had to necessarily move on to something new for every issue. In that regard I was a good journalist, but perhaps a poor practitioner of the arts. Since it was my job to be a good journalist, that was necessarily my focus at the time. I had gathered notebook upon notebook of information, filled dozens of cassette tapes with interviews, collected hundreds of photographs, and shot hours and hours of video tape—yet I never really had the time to explore all of this information to the degree of depth which it merited. I processed the information on the intellectual level, and I feel like I did bring forth a true representation of the material on that level. However, I feel that with something as deep and rich as Ba Gua Zhang, long hours of repetitive practice and contemplation are required in order to really begin to grasp all that it has to offer.

Part of my reason for deciding to stop publishing the *Pa Kua Chang Journal* was the frustration I was feeling in my own practice of Ba Gua. I practiced every day, but my mind was always filled with notions of how I might explain what I was doing and discovering about the art in the *Journal* or to my students. The focus on writing and teaching caused me to approach Ba Gua Zhang on an intellectual and technical level. I was practicing for what I could teach and tell others, and thus I felt my personal growth within the art and my own inward exploration of the art was stagnating to some degree due to this overly mental approach to the art.

When I decided to quit publishing the *Journal* in 1997, things improved a bit, but I was still teaching students at my school every evening and thus a lot of the time I had available for the practice of Ba Gua was spent teaching others instead of practicing for myself. In 1998 I decided to make a big change. I closed my school in California, bought ten acres of land on a secluded mountain top in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, and built a new house. I completely isolated myself from the outside world of martial arts publications, teachers, books, students, and practitioners. In doing this, I finally got the chance to purposefully enter a deeply contemplative phase of my Ba Gua Zhang training. I was no longer a martial arts journalist, teacher, or publisher. I simply became a student of the art.

During the past five years I have done nothing relating to martial arts except practice for myself. I have spent this time carefully processing all of the information that I worked to collect during the seven years that I published the *Pa Kua Chang Journal*. I have studied what all the teachers I had the good fortune to interview and study with taught me and told me. I have worked to analyze all of the common threads that exist in all major lineages of Ba Gua Zhang and I have tried to incorporate into my practice those elements of Ba Gua Zhang that I believe are the most important, but were missing from my practice during the years I was publishing the *Journal* and teaching my students. In order to clarify that last statement I will have to back-track a little and tell you of my background in the martial arts.

I came to the study of internal martial arts after being a long distance runner most of my early life. Just prior to embarking on my study of the internal martial arts, I had also started practicing sitting meditation from the East Indian yogic tradition. I was a competitive distance runner from the time I entered high school (age 14 in 1974) through the time I graduated college (age 22 in 1982). During that period of time there was nothing that I enjoyed more than taking long runs by myself in the woods. Luckily, there was a 5 mile wooded running trail around a lake near my boyhood home and I was able to enjoy daily runs in the solitude and tranquility of this wooded trail.

Later, when I was in college, I built a rustic cabin in the mountains of West Virginia and spent time there alone during the summer months and on long weekends taking long runs down isolated dirt roads in the mountains. For me, the long runs in these secluded wooded areas were very centering and peaceful. The solitude, combined with the rhythm and repetitiveness of the running, put my mind in a “zone” that was very meditative.

During my senior year in college I suffered severe stress fractures in both shins. The doctors told me that I could not run for 8 weeks. After that I tried to return to running, but each time I would try to build up my mileage, my shins would begin to ache. To make a long story short, I went to many different doctors over the next year or so and nothing they recommended seemed to help. In an attempt to regain the feeling and “groove” that I got from running, I tried to take up long distance biking, but it was not the same. The rhythm was different, the roads were different, and the feeling was different. From there I turned to meditation.

In 1983 I met a very wonderful meditation teacher—someone with whom I still maintain contact, respect highly, and study with to this day. He has been my mentor and teacher for 20 years. He teaches the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobino and I began studying this philosophy and meditative practice regularly in 1983. The meditation in this tradition consists of seated meditation practice. I loved practicing seated meditation, but since I had grown up having my body integrally involved in my meditative practice (running), I was craving this same type of integration into my new meditation practice. I was discussing my frustration with a friend of mine and he said, “Have you ever thought about studying Tai Ji Quan or Qi Gong?”

At the time I had never heard of Tai Ji or Qi Gong. My friend had numerous books and videos on both subjects. He lent me the books and we began practicing together in about 1983. That is when my training in these arts began. I was in the Marine Corps at the time and I moved every two years from 1982 until 1992 when I left the service. From 1983 through 1992 I studied either Tai Ji, Xing Yi, or Ba Gua with whoever I could find in the various areas of the country where I was stationed. I would typically search out the best instructor I could find and then study whatever art he was most proficient in teaching.

I relate that brief part of my martial background to give you an understanding of what led me to be interested in the martial arts. I did not come from another martial arts style and I did not take up this practice because I was initially interested in self-defense. I started studying the internal martial arts because I was interested in cultivating that quiet, centered, meditative quality that comes from a calming of the mind and integration of mind, body, and spirit.<sup>1</sup>

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1 - Throughout this essay my use of the words spirit and spiritual are not in any way associated with any form of organized religion. Instead, I use these terms to define internal experience which is associated with a sense of self beyond the physical and mental being and its connection with that which is greater than the individual self.

Those of you who are reading this and are familiar with the *Pa Kua Chang Journal*—or any of the books I either wrote, edited, or compiled on internal martial arts topics—may be a little surprised that my original purpose in approaching these arts was more along the lines of self-cultivation than self-defense. During the years I published the *Journal* I shied away from those topics relating to internal cultivation along spiritual lines and the meditative practices as they pertained to that cultivation. I instead focused on the subtle physical components of the internal martial arts without allowing much discussion of *qi* cultivation or the connection to spirit. Let me tell you why that happened.

My first few Tai Ji and Ba Gua instructors were heavily into *qi* cultivation and their notion of the “spiritual” aspect of internal arts practice. I did learn Tai Ji and Ba Gua forms from these instructors, but much of the practice involved mental imagery and visualization aimed at linking body, mind, and spirit and enhancing *qi* develop. That may sound like it was great. However, typical of “new agers,” the instructors I had were not very good at teaching these methods in the context of internal martial arts. Their teaching mostly consisted of a “new age” mixed bag of “esoteric” practices that were haphazardly mixed with Tai Ji and Ba Gua forms and exercises. The teaching was not systematic nor authentic, nor were the vital subtleties of the physical practice taught correctly. The focus of these instructors was so heavily weighted on the energetic aspects of the practice that the physical aspects—correct body alignments, vital internal physical connections, proper development of internal strength, etc.—were either ignored (due to the instructor’s lack of knowledge of these things) or not taught correctly when the attempt was made. These teachers had simply learned a variety of meditations, awareness exercises, and mental visualization practices from various sources and were hanging it all on the framework of studying Ba Gua or Tai Ji. As a result, it just wasn’t working for me, or any of my fellow students, and I was becoming very disillusioned with these instructors and the practice.

The hodge-podge, haphazard approach to training that I received from various instructors was not the only problem I encountered in my early years of training. I later discovered that even if their instruction relating to the development of *qi* and refinement of the energetic qualities of the arts had been correct and true, it would not have been completely effective because I had not first obtained a solid internal, or external, martial arts foundation upon which I could build the more subtle energetic aspects. Without a solid physical base, I did not possess the physical skills necessary to support the energetic development. It would be analogous to trying to play soulful, inspired music on a musical instrument that you really weren’t very adept at playing. Good intention cannot take the place of fundamental and practical skill.

I had grown up playing a variety of Western sports and thus I had a certain degree of strength, flexibility, and coordination. However, the physical aspects of internal martial arts practice are far more demanding than what is required in your average Western sport. Even though I was physically strong and coordinated in the Western sense, I was lacking the physical foundation in the subtleties of internal martial movements during my early years of study. My teachers were too involved in the “energy” aspects of the arts to present their students with the physical aspects of training, which are critical prerequisites for the deeper aspects of energy training.

Because of my early experience with these teachers, I came to believe that the inner cultivation, development, and refinement of *qi*, using internal martial arts as the vehicle, requires that you first obtain a good martial arts foundation and become skilled at the physical as-

pects of the internal martial arts before the inner cultivation and *qi* development can begin in earnest. I became convinced that the physical aspects of the art were vital in supporting the energetic aspects and unless the physical skills were cultivated to a high degree, the energetic aspects would never be able to reach their full potential and flourish in the context of these arts.

This realization came to me about the time I first started publishing the *Pa Kua Chang Journal* in 1990 and the catalyst for this change of thought was brought about by studying with my first Xing Yi instructor, Ken Fish. With my previous instructors “the *qi*” had been everything. There was little practical training in these schools for the development of naturally aligned strength, subtle internal physical connections and body alignments, or the development of “*gong li*” (trained strength). My past teachers thought that they were teaching these things and thought that they knew what they were doing. However, I found that their ideas regarding the physical areas of training were clouded over by their impression that “the *qi*” could do everything. There was no systematic training method for the correct development and refinement of real “internal” physical skills.

In Ken Fish’s school, practice of the rigorous repetitive drills that develop the physical skills required to build an internal martial arts foundation is all we did. There was little mention of *qi*, or spirit, or inner cultivation. It was the exact opposite of where I had come from; however, I felt that it was exactly what I needed at the time. During the first year of practice with Ken Fish, the focus of my martial arts training did a complete 180 degree turn from *qi* development and self-cultivation to physical development and self-defense.

About a year after I started studying with Ken, he introduced me to Park Bok Nam and I began training Ba Gua Zhang with Park. About a year after I met Park, I also began studying Xing Yi Quan with Vince Black. Both Park and Vince Black have developed very thorough, step-by-step, graduated training methods that encompass all aspects of internal martial arts training and do so in a very complete and systematic manner. I was, and remain, very impressed with their teaching methods and training curriculums. Both Park’s and Vince Black’s systems necessarily begin the practitioner with the building of a very strong martial arts foundation by first developing solid physical skills. What I began learning from Park and Vince Black completely fit my line of thinking at the time. I continued to focus my efforts on the refinement of my physical skills through a repetitive practice of basic drills, forms, and exercises during the years I studied with Park and Vince Black.

During the seven years that I published the *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, my focus remained on the development of highly refined physical internal martial arts skills and application of those skills in self-defense. The skilled practitioners that I met in Taiwan and mainland China also taught and practiced along these lines. Thus this was the thrust of most of the editorial articles that I wrote for the *Journal*. I focused on the physical aspects and shied away from the more energetic aspects. I still believed in the energetic aspects; but my belief, based on my experience, was that it would be very difficult for anyone to get very far along the *qi* cultivation and refinement path, using internal martial arts as their vehicle, without first having developed a sufficient level of physical skill in the arts. If the physical body has not been sufficiently developed in terms of internal strength; internal and external physical alignments; efficiency, continuity, and fluidity in motion; and highly refined and practiced timing and coordination, then the body would not be able to properly support high levels of development and refinement of internal energy. I still maintain that view in some respects, although my perspective has shifted over the past four or five years.

The focus of my personal training for the past four years has been to strive to infuse every single movement that I make in the practice of Ba Gua Zhang with fullness of energy and attention to spirit. I try to allow the energy around me and the energy inside me to fuse as one energetic continuum and let every physical movement flow in that moment as if I am not the source of that movement, but as if I am being guided by a union of inner and outer forces working in harmony. I try to address this practice with respect and reverence, viewing it less as a physical exercise and more as a spiritual ritual and a journey towards the discovery of the One great energy and spirit that unites all things. I realize that this description of Ba Gua practice may sound like “new age mystical mumbo-jumbo,” and it is definitely the kind of statement that I would have avoided making at all costs during the years that I published the *Pa Kua Chang Journal* for fear of being labeled a “new age crackpot.” However, I now believe that without this kind of attitude towards practice, Ba Gua becomes little more than a physical exercise and thus, in this context, the aspects of the art that can bring the greatest long-term personal rewards will never be able to mature. I guess I’ve done another 180.

In a sense my practice has come full circle in that the focus of my practice is now back to that which is more energetic and spiritual as opposed to that which is more physical. I feel that the years that I spent focusing on the more physical aspects were well worth the time and effort because I now have a substantial physical framework and skill-base on which to hang the energetic and spiritual work. However, I now can’t help but wonder if the two approaches couldn’t be successfully integrated and combined from the very beginning of one’s exposure to the art. Without having spent eight years of my training focused on the subtle physical aspects of the internal martial arts I might not have been able to effectively shift my focus to the more energetic aspects of the art and reap the same benefits. But, looking back, I wonder what the result would have been had I had been able to effectively train all of the necessary physical aspects while simultaneously maintaining a closer connection to the refinement of the energetic aspects.

Having traced this circular practice path over the past 20 years, I look back now at the places that I have been and the lessons that I have learned and realize that if I had it to do all over again, there are a number of things that my 43-year-old self would like to tell my 23-year-old self in order to help save some time and effort in the process of learning the internal martial arts. (Isn’t this always the way! I’m sure that my 63-year-old self will also have things to tell my 43 year-old self that completely elude me at the present time.) Along those same lines, there are some things that I wrote in the *Pa Kua Chang Journal* that I would write differently if given the chance. With this release of the *Pa Kua Chang Journal* back issues on CD-ROM, I feel like I have that chance. I am not going to change anything that was written in the *Journal*. I will present all 38 issues on this CD-ROM as they were originally published. However, I also feel compelled to provide you with some new perspectives. I want to have the opportunity to modify and expand a few of the editorials that I published in the *Journal* and provide you with my updated views on the practice and study of Ba Gua Zhang. The vehicle I will use to do this is a website: <http://www.pakuachangjournal.com>.

For the past five years I have been the editor and publisher of an acoustic guitar publication called *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* (for more info visit <http://www.flatpick.com>). During that time I have had the opportunity to interview dozens of the top acoustic guitar players in this country. Inevitably the conversation will turn to the art of improvisation in music. Because the music these guitar players engage in is highly improvisational, I have learned a great deal from them regarding the differences between art based on the use of “technique” or “technical skill” and art based on a connection with the inner self—the “heart and soul” of

individual expression. The insights that I have gained from these talented musicians easily translate to the practice of Ba Gua Zhang, or for that matter, any other form of art. I will also add some of these insights, which I lacked while publishing the *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, to the information on my website.

One of the musicians I recently interviewed expressed his views on learning to play music improvisationally and I found that his ideas reflected my experience in the study of Ba Gua Zhang. He said that he felt like the path to being an improvisational player was circular: when one first picks up an instrument they feel inspired to create something fresh and unique, but they do not possess the technical skill on the instrument that is required to be able to express themselves freely. First they have to study the fundamentals of the instrument. They practice with a metronome to improve their timing; they practice scales, arpeggios, and chord forms to familiarize themselves with their instrument; and they develop left and right hand techniques that help them improve their tone, timbre, note clarity, and dynamics. They also repetitively practice arrangements of tunes that others have created in order to develop a sense of style and work within the parameters of melody and genre. After all this work has been completed the musician then has the fundamental skills needed in order to begin free expression within the context of the art form.

This explanation made perfect sense to me because it is exactly what had happened to me in the study of Ba Gua Zhang. The frustration that occurred in my early practice was due to the fact that I was trying to achieve and cultivate a soulful expression of the art when I was lacking the fundamental skills necessary for the development of such an expression. After pondering my development in the internal arts in this light, I felt that I had done the right thing in abandoning the *qi* cultivation and spiritual refinement aspects of the art for seven or eight years and focusing on the fundamental physical skills of the art. I also felt satisfied and fulfilled in my more recent practice of integrating the energetic and spiritual aspects of the art into the physical foundation that I had worked years to develop. However, it was in my search to become a better guitar player and musician that I also began to realize that my practice of Ba Gua Zhang through the years might have been better served if I had worked to address the physical, energetic, mental, and spiritual aspects of Ba Gua Zhang with equal attention during that period of time when my primary focus had been on the physical.

In addition to interviewing guitar players and practicing the guitar on my own, I have read several good books written by musicians which were related to the topics of improvisation and soulful musical expression. These books opened my eyes to an approach to Ba Gua Zhang training that I had not fully realized in the past (I will discuss some of these ideas and concepts in the section of my website which relates to the improvisational aspects of Ba Gua Zhang).

As time rolls on, perspectives constantly shift based on our experiences with our practice and in our life. If you had asked me five, ten, or fifteen years ago if I was integrating the energetic aspects, the spiritual aspects, and the physical aspects of Ba Gua Zhang in my practice, I would have told you that I was indeed doing that and I could have told you all about the importance of such things. However, in honest reflection, I can say that today my idea of all of the component parts of Ba Gua Zhang practice—and their multi-dimensional aspects—is much different than it was five, ten, or fifteen years ago. As the depth and breadth of my experience, knowledge, and understanding of art, and life in general, have continued to deepen and mature over the years, I have found that my definition of “internal” as it relates to the martial arts and my idea of how to integrate the mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, and

energetic aspects of this art have continually matured. Hopefully, if I am able to continue to approach my practice with an open mind and a sense of awe and wonder, I will continue to grow and mature. Thus what I offer to you on my website is simply my current approach and perspective. Check back with my website every once in a while and we can share all of the new discoveries that we have both made along the Way.

Early on in my martial arts career, someone told me that in China the difference between the internal martial arts and the external martial arts was not in the level of skill attained, the techniques used, or the movements of the body because at the highest martial skill levels these arts were all very much the same. The difference was described as one having to do with the training process. In the beginning levels of training, external artists focused more on the external physical skills while the internal martial artists focused equally on both the internal and external aspects. I “knew” this years ago and in the *Pa Kua Chang Journal* I even wrote about the importance of integrating *wai gong*, *nei gong*, and *qi gong* in one’s training program, emphasizing that they were mutually supportive of each other at every level of training. However, until the last two or three years of my practice I don’t think I really understood the full weight and depth of this important concept. The articles I post on my website will serve as a statement of my current, but ever changing, ideas regarding the study of the art of Ba Gua Zhang. If you are interested, please visit <http://pakuachangjournal.com>.

“The existence of things is like a galloping horse. There is no movement through which they do not become modified, no time when they are not changed.”

—Zhuang Zi

I hope you enjoy the CD-ROM version of back issues of the *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, and I wish you success in your research, study, and practice of Ba Gua Zhang.

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