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HEALTH for the 4 Seasons through Baguazhang

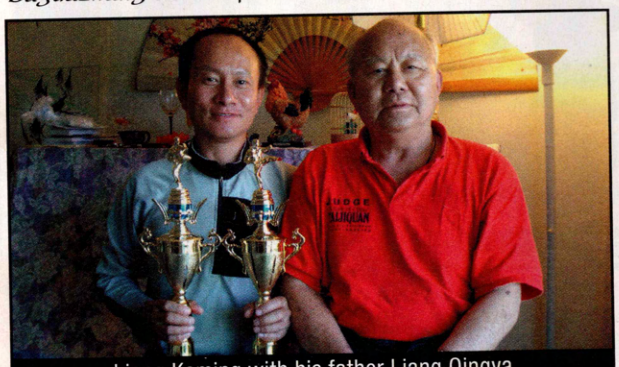
By Liang Keming with Gigi Oh

Baguazhang, an old but fashionable name in Chinese, together with *Taiji* and *Xingyi*, are said to be the three internal Chinese martial arts systems. They are homologous yet have distinct characters and complement each other to progress together. The difference between internal and external forms is in the basic practice, which has different exercising methods. In the end, regardless of the differences, when they reach the peak, they are the same thing. But due to differing initial concepts, they take different routes. It is often said that practicing the external martial arts is good to a certain age, then switching to practice the internal boxing is better for fitness and health. The internal styles have both the skills of the combat and the function of health, and are also in line with the traditional Chinese philosophy of yin and yang, as well as the Five Elements theory.

In the period of Qing Emperor Xianfeng (1850–1861 CE 咸丰帝), *Baguazhang* founder Dong Haichuan (董海川) left his hometown, Hebei Wenan County Zhu Wucun Village (河北文安县朱家坞村). He traveled through Wuyue Bashu (吴越巴蜀, today's Sichuan and South Anhui area) to visit martial friends. When he toured Jiuhua Mountain in Anhui Province (安徽九华山), he pursued the study the *Cloud Disc Ancestral Secret* (*yun pan laozu mi chuan* 云盘老祖秘传). After that, Dong created *Baguazhang* (eight diagram palm 八卦掌) in harmony with Chinese theories of Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang and Five Elements. Because the majority of Dong's disciples were older and already had other martial arts training, he taught them each according to their ability to play to their individual strengths. Therefore, there are a variety of Baguazhang systems that have been passed down. The most influential ones are Yin-style, Cheng-style, Liang-style, Fan-style and Si-style (尹式、程式、梁式、樊式、史式等), among others.

Baguazhang is a unique martial arts system. It combines the health and martial techniques, self-cultivation and moral ethics into one. It uses a circle as movement orbits, walking in circles as movement method. Walking is one of the simplest forms of human exercise. *Baguazhang* walks in a circle, both in revolution and self-rotation. The revolution is to walk the large circle with eight steps, while at the same time the body is self-rotating to face the center of the circle. Through these conscious revolution rotations, muscle, blood vessels, and abdominal organs are repeatedly twisted and massaged, which can elicit vasoconstriction and vasodilation so that blood vessel wall attachments are reduced and dissolved into the blood. The body's internal vessels become unobstructed naturally, which will increase the blood flow rate. The impurities are excreted through the sweat. The blood vessel walls increase flexibility and the blood is cleared, allowing a return to normal function.

Walking the *Baguazhang* circle for a longer period of time can reduce the risk of high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and heart and brain disease. When it comes to disease, prevention is better than treatment. In the Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic (*Huangdi Neijing* 黄帝内经), the first text *Suwen* (basic questions 素問) said this more specifically and profoundly: "The Sage does not cure disease – cure before it's not yet ill; do not treat chaos, govern before it's not yet chaotic (圣人不治已病治未病; 不治已乱治未乱)." The purpose of achieving health is not only to exercise but also to conserve. Just exercise without conservation is equivalent to expense without income. Likewise, being only conservative without exercise is equivalent to only consuming without expelling out the waste. Bias in favor of either side will make the body out of balance. Therefore, in the traditional Chinese philosophy, there is Yin and Yang theory; a good combination of Yin and Yang is called Tao. Yin and Yang coexist in harmony, not to be biased on either side. This is what Dong Haichuan founded *Baguazhang* based upon.


Liang Keming with his father Liang Qingya

In the practice of *Baguazhang* walking, the palm, body posture, and footwork have specific requirements. The head and neck are upright. Sink the shoulders. Drop the elbows. Pull the chest back. Converge the buttocks. The tongue gently touches the upper palate. The qi sinks in the *dantian* (energy center 丹田). Bend the knees slightly. Sit on the hip joints. The two feet move flatly up and down. Hold the upper body in stillness while lower body moves. Keep a static and dynamic form from top to bottom, with Yin and Yang distinct. Exercising and nourishing were originally opposed, but if there is no exercising, one cannot achieve the purpose of nourishment. And if there is no nourishing in mind, the exercising is an empty word. When following the above-mentioned *Baguazhang* exercise methods for practice, combine with your *shen* (spirit 神) and *yi* (mind 意). The mind directs and qi follows. *Yi* is a guide. *Shen* trains you to focus, to concentrate. *Yi* is like an invisible acupuncture needle. *Shen* is like an invisible moxibustion. Where the needle penetrates, moxibustion follows. Practice often uses mind to guide qi and uses the shen to dissolve stagnation. Persistent practice will improve the health and prevent illnesses. By intuitively approaching *Baguazhang* from a health perspective, combined with certain acupoints for health treatment and subconscious ideas and mental observation, you can refine and maintain your body.

There is a distinct difference between *Baguazhang* and other martial arts. At the beginning, based on Yin Yang and Five Elements theory, Grandmaster Dong separated the Yin and Yang of each hexagram (the '*gua*' in *Baguazhang* 卦) of its eight diagrams palm. Each palm has left and right movements, while most other forms of Chinese boxing only have the left movement. When Grandmaster Fu Zhensong (1872–1853 傅振嵩) compiled Fu-style Taijiquan (also according to the principle of *Baguazhang*), he blended in Chen, Yang, and Sun-style Taijiquan. Therefore, the first half of the Fu-style Taiji is the left postures and the latter half is the right side movements. Left side and right side movements will enhance the body's balancing ability, so that the muscles of the body are evenly rounded. As human activity is dominated by the human brain, ordinary people usually depend on one side to work; so it is easy to have one side of the brain not fully utilized, with the muscles on that side soft and loose, while the other side is often overworked and the muscles over-tight. In result, the left and right side of the body have uneven development. In the *Baguazhang* exercises, training is on both sides of the body so the brain and limbs can be fully mobilized for usage. This will make the expenditure of endocrine balanced and unblock the meridians. It will also have a significant effect on the prevention of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, stroke, and brain degeneration.

Humans live on Earth and are the product of nature, so the human body is bound with the natural world of Yin and Yang and the information of Five Elements. Throughout the year, the body follows the changes in the four seasons and will need to make adjustments. Due to the pressure of excess work, the human body needs to use exercise and nurse the body back to health, so that the body regains its Yin and Yang balance. Exercise and health are inseparable from the world and follow the "Tao of the Five Elements of Yin and Yang." The natural law of the four seasons is "sprout in spring, grow up in summer, harvest in autumn, preserve in winter." All the health work is summed up in four characters: *guban zhumo* (固本逐末). *Guban* means consolidating thru fitness and exercise. *Zhumo* is nursing back to health. Through means such as meridians, solar terms, diet, and therapeutic regimens to balance Yin and Yang, practitioners can achieve health. Thousands of years of ancestral wisdom concludes, "Nourishing Yang in Spring and Summer, Nourishing Yin in Autumn and Winter (*chun xia yang yang, qiu dong yang yin* 春夏养阳，秋冬养阴)." Accordingly, *Baguazhang* predecessors created a lot of training methods. The following method is to introduce the *Baguazhang* Four Seasons Health Work (*si ji yang sheng gong* 四季养生功).

Baguazhang Four Seasons Health Work

The *Baguazhang* Four Seasons Health Work are four basic walking exercises from *Baguazhang* attuned to each season. Each exercise should be practiced during their according season. Generally three or four circles of repetition are recommended for daily practice. Each circle is eight steps. And each circle is repeated on both sides for a complete and balanced sequence.

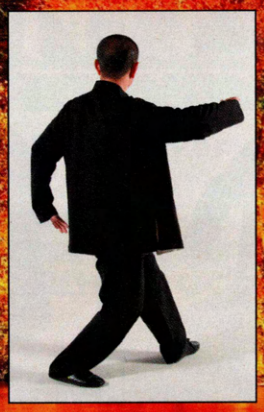
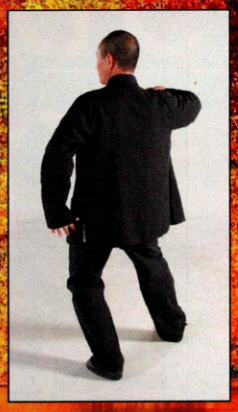
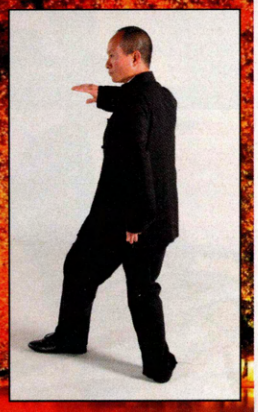
Spring exercises: Your palms open facing up. Raise your palm higher than the shoulder yet below the head with yi of "supporting." Twist the waist so your body is facing the center of the circle. The tongue gently touches the upper palate in the mouth. Gently pull up the *Huiyin* (perineum 会阴穴) point. Walk in *Bagua* steps with *yi* consciously on the *Baihui* (top of the head 百会) point. *Shen* focuses on observing the *Baihui* point. According to the Five Elements theory, spring belongs to wood and it is the growth of all things with Yang energy rising. The health work is characterized by homeopathy and balance. *Baihui* is the connecting point of the *Ren* (conception vessel along the anterior of the body from pubis to mouth 任) and *Du* (governing vessel along the anterior of the body from the root of the spine to the nape of the neck 督) vessels. In Chinese, *bai* (百) means one hundred and *hui* (会) means to meet or join, so the name *Baihui* comes from a hundred meridians intersecting there. *Baihui* has the Yang energy, rising to awaken and resuscitate the brain. *Sheng* and *yi* stay in *Baihui*, so that the human body constantly germinates Yang energy upward, all the while gently pulling up the Huiyin point. Baihui and Huiyin line up so that the body connects in a straight line of Yang up and Yin down to channel and balance the body's Yin and Yang energy.

SPRING

SUMMER

Summer exercises: Your palms are flat, extending in front of your body at shoulder height. Your arms are circular as in an embrace in front of the chest; however, your palms are facing outward with fingers pointing at each other. Twist the waist so the body faces the center of the circle. The tongue gently touches the upper palate in the mouth. Gently pull up the *Huiyin* point. Walk in *Bagua* steps with the *yi* focus on the leg *zusanli* point (below the knee on the anterior tibialis muscle 足三里). Summer in the Five Elements theory belongs to fire. The long summer belongs to Earth, which is the growth of all things. Health work consists of avoiding summer heat illness, nourishing Yin energy and creating saliva. *Zusanli* is the body's most healthcare-oriented acupoint. With its ability to strengthen vital qi function, it can strengthen the spleen and stomach.

FALL

Fall Exercises: Your palms are one in front, the other one behind you back with your arms circular as if embracing your body. Your palms push out with resistance, but also hold back. Twist the waist so the body faces the center of the circle. The tongue gently touches the upper palate. Gently pull up the *Huiyin* point. Walk in *Bagua* steps with the *yi* focus on the *Yintang* (between the eyebrows 印堂) point, with *shen* consciously staring at *Yintang*. Withdraw all outward consciousness to keep a sound mind. Fall in the Five Elements theory belong to metal. It's the harvest season of the year, so health work is characterized by peace and convergence. *Yintang* acupuncture point has a tranquilizing effect that also brightens eyesight. The autumn dry weather easily impacts the human body with insomnia or fatigue. Observation of *Yintang* point helps to foster peaceful sleep.

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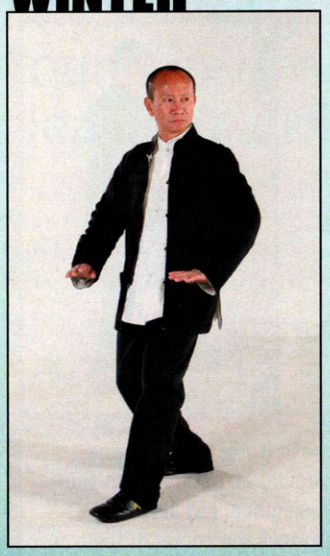
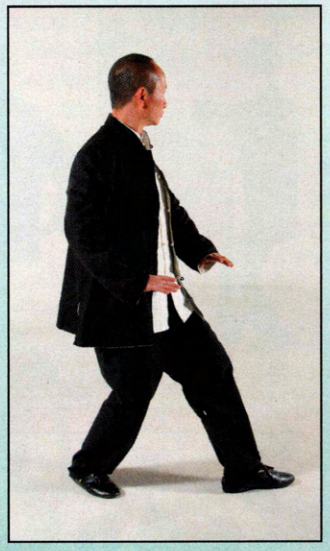
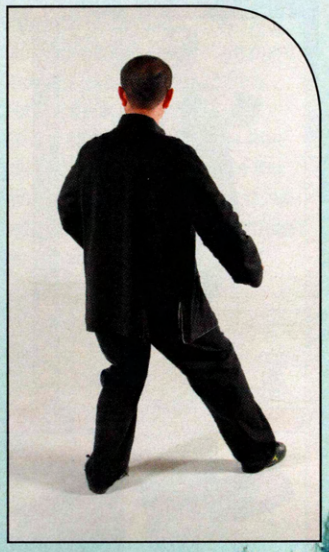
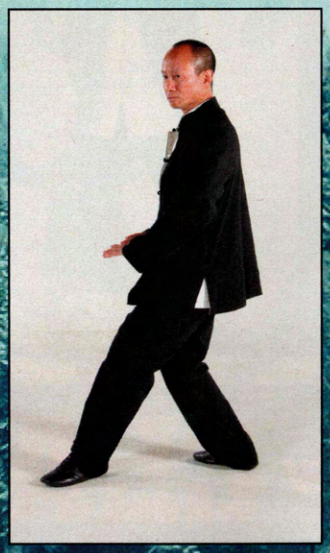
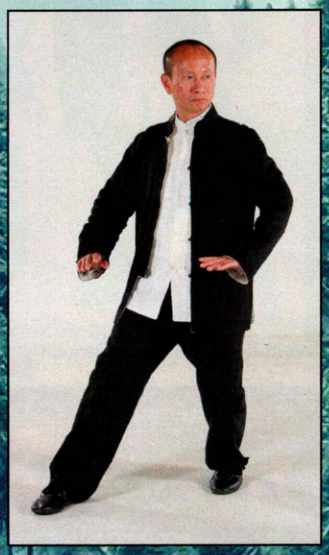
WINTER



"Do not treat chaos, govern before it's not yet chaotic..."

Winter Exercises: Your palms press down around the waist on both sides, at hip height. Twist the waist so the body faces the center of the circle. The tongue gently touches the upper palate. Gently pull up the *Huiyin* point. Walk in *Bagua* steps with the *yi* focus on *dantian* (energy center located just below the navel 丹田). *Shen* and *yi* withhold internally. Winter in the Five Elements theory belongs to water, so it is the collection of the season. Health work is characterized by the hidden, by concealment, by adaptation. *Dantian* is the most important acupoint of the body. It anchors our fundamental qi and tonifies kidney function. *The Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic* states, "If winter does not reserve essence, spring will bring illness (如果冬天没有保留精华，春天会带来疾病)." Therefore, we must attach importance to the meaning of winter reservation. *Baguazhang* and the core theory of traditional Chinese medicine are mutually integrated and reciprocally influenced, a profound reflection of the relationship between man and nature with a common theoretical basis. ☯

Master Liang Keming (梁克明) grew up following his father, Master Liang Qiangya (梁强亚) in practicing *Baguazhang* and Taijiquan. He is a 5th generation descendant of *Baguazhang* and an inheritor of Fu-style *Baguazhang*, derived from Dong Haichuan's disciple Jia Qishan (贾岐山), then passed to Grandmaster Fu Zhensong (傅振嵩). Master Liang's father was one of the few indoor disciples of Grandmaster Fu. As a child, he joined the Guangzhou city middle school student Wushu team and later studied under Guangdong Province Wushu Association 7 duan Wu-style Taijiquan master, Chen Zihao (陈子浩). Liang has won numerous gold medals for *Bagua*, Taiji form and weapons at Guangzhou Province Traditional Championships and other noted tournaments. Master Liang current resides and teaching Bagua and Taiji at Hercules, California. He can be reached at keming-liang@hotmail.com.

To see Master Liang Keming recite *Baguazhang Four Seasons Health Work*, visit the KungFuMagazine.com Youtube Channel.