INTRODUCTION
Learning Bagua: Physical, Energetic and Mental Principles

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Section 1
Learning Bagua

Physical Principles

In the Bagua Mastery Program,™ you will encounter the principles and techniques that are the basic foundation of bagua and tai chi as movement practices. The better you get at the physical, energetic and mental principles, the better your bagua and Single Palm Change will be, and the closer you will move toward accomplishing the benefits that bagua has to offer.

Train Sensibly

Training sensibly starts with the eighty percent rule. Only practice to a maximum of eighty percent of what you can do at your most extreme effort. If you have not done any physical exercise for some time, then you should only do fifty to seventy percent of your ability. If you have had any recent injuries, you would adjust your practice to thirty to fifty percent and practice for shorter periods of time. If you have any questions about the frequency or intensity of your training,
please consult your physician. The eighty percent rule is only for those people who are physically fit and healthy high performers. Bagua has the ability to take you to the pinnacle of performance, but only if you stay within your body’s natural limits.

Frankly speaking, unless you’re very young, you won’t get much more from your practice for training more than two hours. The nature of bagua is that as you increase your speed with practice, you get double the workout in the same amount of time. There’s a great difference between running a twelve-minute mile and repeating a six-minute mile over and over again because the amount of pressure on your system dramatically increases in the latter.

Find a practice space where you feel psychologically at ease. Don’t practice in places where anything is grating on your nervous system or making you feel like you want to flee or psychologically or spiritually shut down.

Don’t train hard one day, then not practice at all for a few days or even a week, and try to make up for the lack of practice by doing a marathon blast the next time. This strategy will render you incapable of exerting your full eighty percent effort with the degree of strength you would have been capable of if you had a steadier, day-to-day regimen. Consistent practice will build up your strength and stamina so that eventually you will be able to go longer than a single hour in one session.

Do not practice in an area with high wind because it can go into your pores and cause a cold or worse.

Cultivate an Even, Smooth and Long Breath

It’s very important when practicing bagua that your breath becomes very even, smooth and preferably long. At times, it is difficult to coordinate physical movements with the breath because some movements can be longer or shorter,
especially in the Single Palm Change. Whatever you do, don’t hold your breath. Instead, see if you can make your breath become long, very smooth and calm. Your primary goal should be to make sure your breath does not excite or over stimulate your central nervous system.

**Never Twist or Spiral the Spine**

In bagua, never twist the vertebrae of your spine. Only twist around your spine, but not into it. Twist only from the front of the abdomen so you create a spiral inside and into your internal organs. Although this twisting of the spine may be done in spinal twists in Hatha yoga, it is never practiced in bagua or tai chi.

Turning and twisting actions are meant to stimulate your spinal cord and twist your internal organs, but not to twist your spine. The central principle in bagua is practicing so that the spine becomes straight and flexible, and able to move in all directions with ease. If you twist the spinal vertebrae, your ability to move quickly will become compromised.

You should twist from the center of your body between your perineum and the center of head, along the central channel, which is located in the middle of the torso—neither to the front or sides. This is the place your torso revolves around.

Never, never, never should you have any sense of turning or twisting from the spinal vertebrae themselves.

**Cultivate a Bear Body and Shoulders (Intermediates)**

In bagua, cultivating bear shoulders means more than just keeping your shoulders down. A bear body involves the shoulders and shoulder blades being slightly rounded and sprung forward. The back muscles open and round sideways from the spine to the buttocks while the area in the front of your hips
sucks in (called liu tun shi kwa in Chinese). The head is up and the chin is slightly tucked so that the crown of the head is directly over the center of the pelvis, i.e. the perineum.

**Develop Physical Internal Cohesion (Intermediates)**

You must endeavor to feel an ever-increasing sense of internal cohesion in your body. This must be a concrete, tangible feeling where everything inside your body draws into your core and becomes a cohesive and integrated whole. All body parts should feel directly connected to every other body part. In gross and subtle ways, you should gain the ability to feel if any body part is disconnected from any other body part or your mind.

Internal cohesion goes beyond proper internal or external alignments of ordinary tai chi or qigong whose main purpose is to provide a sound bio-mechanical base for the body. This is what prevents you from wasting or blocking your chi. Maintaining proper body alignments is a good preliminary step, but you could still lack a strong sense of internal cohesion. This point is worth remembering, so I’ll cover it further in modules to come.

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**CHI AND THE INTERNAL SENSES**

*The ability to relatively or precisely feel chi does not derive from your external senses, but rather from your internal senses. All esoteric traditions seek to awaken and develop these senses in people. For example, the classic texts of India’s yoga and Kundalini traditions are quite specific that there are five external and five internal senses (ten in total), ideas which Taoism and Buddhism also share.*
Develop a Dragon Body and the Central Axis (Intermediates)

While maintaining a bear body with internal cohesion, you must also, with every turning of the waist, develop what is called the Dragon Body. In the Dragon Body, your torso must become able to clearly segment the hips, abdomen and chest, so each one can turn in different directions along the body’s central axis. It runs through the center of the body where the central channel of energy is located. All turning must eventually emanate from a spiral that originates in the central axis and moves between it and the body’s extremities (toes, fingers and crown of the head).

From this central axis, you must create a powerful sense of internal cohesion where everything comes together with a distinct sense of solidity. So, rather than only feeling as though everything is kind of light and floating inside of your body, a heavy connecting force gets created where everything inside your body collects right along the central channel. You don’t want any sense of anything being diffused or amorphous.

This quality in bagua and extremely high-level tai chi can be more important than maintaining correct external body alignments in general.

This point is distinct from most ordinary qigong or tai chi that is practiced for health, where the primary function of correct external or internal alignments is to ensure that you don’t waste or block energy flow. This said neither correct external nor internal alignments alone can necessarily create massive internal cohesion with everything coming together around the core of your body.
Energetic Principles

The original chi cultivation (qigong) system in China invented by the Taoists is called neigong (also known as nei gung and nei kung). Neigong or “internal power” forms the basis for the Taoist system in the internal martial arts of bagua, tai chi and hsing-i. The full range of neigong is made up of sixteen components. Each component forms a segment of a circle and each is organically connected to the rest. The order listed below is not fixed and linear, only descriptive.

The sixteen basic components of Taoist neigong include:

1. Breathing methods, from the simple to the more complex.

2. Feeling, moving, transforming, and transmuting internal energies along both the descending, ascending, and connecting energy channels of the body.

3. Precise body alignments to prevent the flow of chi from being blocked or dissipated–practicing these principles brings exceptionally effective biomechanical alignments.

4. Dissolving blockages of the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of ourselves.

5. Moving energy through the main and secondary meridian channels of the body, including the energy gates.

6. Bending and stretching the body from the inside out and from the outside in along the direction of the yin and yang acupuncture meridian lines.

7. Opening and closing all parts of the body’s tissues (joints, muscles, soft tissues, internal organs, glands, blood vessels, cerebrospinal system, and brain), as well as all the body’s subtle energy anatomy.

8. Manipulating the energy of the external aura outside the body.
9. Making circles and spirals of energy inside the body, controlling the spiraling energy currents of the body, and moving chi to any part of the body at will, especially to the glands, brain, and internal organs.

10. Absorbing energy into, and projecting energy away from, any part of the body.

11. Controlling all the energies of the spine.

12. Gaining control of the left and right energy channels of the body.

13. Gaining control of the central energy channel of the body.

14. Learning to develop the capabilities and all the uses of the body’s lower tantien (hara or elixir/cinnabar field).

15. Learning to develop the capabilities and all the uses of the body’s upper and middle tantiens.

16. Connecting every part of the physical body into one unified energy.

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Bagua plays with the energetic contact with your etheric field, each relating to qualities of the different of the I Ching’s eight trigrams.

The Water trigram is similar to the method that the late tai chi master Cheng Man Ching called “swimming in air.” You feel the sense of the air being heavy, like being under water, which lays its weight on your arms as you attempt to move through the water (or eventually even heavier molasses). This in turn creates a kind of energetic resistance, which penetrates your arms to the bone and makes your arms feel exceedingly heavy.
Because it is impossible to state the precise beginning or end of a circle, the sixteen components have neither beginnings nor end points. Each catalyzes and influences the others as they flow in and out of each other. As such, every time you revisit any one or more of the sixteen components, it becomes possible to go to a deeper, more fulfilling and beneficial level.

Bagua was developed from the Taoist sixteen neigong with the purpose of embodying the eight universal energies of the *I Ching*. Conversely, all the other Taoist arts—qigong, tai chi and hsing-i—are external forms infused with neigong.

First and foremost, all the energetic principles, content and relevant specific techniques and general methods of the sixteen neigong are the core of how all bagua's energy work is done.

It's very important to realize that above and beyond the list's description of the basic sixteen, although they may sound very simple, they are not. Each of the sixteen has an incredible amount of variations in the ways each individually can be applied.

For example, pulsing (opening and closing) the joints is a hugely important neigong concept that applies to:

- Internal organs
- Energy gates
- Body cavities
- The three tantiens
- Entire range of energy channels within the body and their specific points
- How pulsing specifically happens in any and every direction and in all eight energy bodies.

If you consider all the implications of trying to make the sixteen neigong happen in real time, it gets even more complicated.
Separate and Combine

Critical to the nature of implanting the sixteen neigong in bagua is the principle of first separate, then combine, which is so eloquently and tersely expressed in the *Tai Chi Classics* (the theoretical foundation for the martial art of tai chi chuan).

First, you learn how to perform any single neigong component. Then, you work with it until your body can digest it and do it on demand reasonably effortlessly or, even better yet, in a strong manner. Next, you integrate it into your system to where you can do it effortlessly without even thinking about it. This is analogous of the journey of learning to ride a bike or drive a car with all the pitfalls and learning curves. Finally, you arrive at being able to ride your bike or drive your car effortlessly and (hopefully) well.

So you learn one method, work through it and then stabilize it until you become comfortable with it. Then and only then do you integrate it into your system as you are truly ready to learn the next component.

Once you learn and successfully absorb two independent neigong pieces, you combine, integrate and coordinate them together in a seamless manner.

Then, you repeat the process as you add yet a third neigong component until you can seamlessly embody all three within your physical movements.

Learn, develop, stabilize, become comfortable with and integrate each piece you learn before moving on to the next one. This basic energetic principle is ideally how all qigong, bagua, tai chi and Taoist meditation systems should be learned.
Bagua Plays With Etheric Energies: Earth Trigram

The etheric resistance of the earth trigram feels dramatically heavier and stronger than the Water trigram—like mud rather than water. This differential is not about the relative hierarchy of bagua and tai chi, but rather pertains to a basic Heaven and Earth chi principle of Taoist thought: Naturally, the chi of the upper body moves upward (heaven) and is lighter while the chi of the lower body descends and is naturally heavier (earth).

Activating “swimming in air” for the arms and mud walking for the legs can then be used to create peng jin, or “expansive energy,” in both the arms and legs. You must become sufficiently sensitive to the energetic sense of moving inch by inch through something that’s heavy and viscous to accomplish this. Paying attention to these qualities is the road to developing a great energetic sensitivity and power.

Understanding Chi Is Simple

Although the parts of the sixteen neigong can sound very complex, your goal during practice is to seamlessly combine them into one coherent whole. This is where the concept of chi becomes progressively more simple and comprehensible to you.

Although there is only one chi in the body, it functions in many specific manners. However, if you are going to really get into the techniques of understanding chi, the devil is most certainly in the details. This is where the better teachers can help by imparting the more complete story. The better they do, the more the student is able to get it and ultimately benefit—regardless of whether they train
for physical health, martial arts or meditation.

At one level, meditation is nothing more than making all the human potential within you become whole and intact, not partial. Bagua is one path which enables you to realize that wholeness.

**Become Sensitive to Chi**

Sensitivity to chi is an important part of bagua practice in two ways:

1. How the different kinds of chi generated by the sixteen neigong affect flow within your body.

2. How the energetic relationships and qualities you can generate as your body moves within the air that surrounds you contacts your etheric body’s chi.

**Ways to Develop Chi Sensitivity**

You can think of developing chi sensitivity as a two-part process. In part one, you tune your mind and imagination in such a way that you can detect subtle feelings and distinctions, such as the difference between water and mud. This becomes the bridge to feeling chi on a gross level. In part two, once you have a gross general feeling of chi, continue to refine it to where it becomes very specific and precise. Otherwise it remains as some nebulous or generalized feeling where you’re in doubt about whether it’s real.

Perhaps you lightly brush your hand against a piece of wood that has some sort of carvings. You have a vague idea that the wood has some kind of carving on the wood, but what? If you press your hand into that wood very slowly, you can start to feel the outline of every bit of the carving until you can interpret what it is. This is sensitivity. Your goal is to use the feeling of swimming in air or walking through mud to create the sensitivity to the etheric field’s chi as you move your hands or legs through it.
Bagua Plays with Etheric Energies:
Wind Trigram

As you progress you play with the etheric field, so that you feel and eventually use the swirling currents of chi that move within it. In bagua, it is affectionately referred to as, “Riding the winds like a celestial dragon.” It’s learned in several stages.

Initially, have your arms and legs absorb and circulate this wind-like chi in your etheric field throughout your body. This chi is meant to provide the juice as it moves within the energy channels of your body to motivate the physical movement of your arms, legs and waist turning—individually or simultaneously. It’s the same quality as blowing wind randomly picking up dry leaves and swirling them in the air. Once this connection between your etheric field’s chi and the inside of your body is made, you use the power of the Heart-Mind to directly become sensitive and connect to the chi inside the etheric field to influence the way the chi flows and eddies in the air. That is you seek to be able to influence the way the energetic wind blows.

Next, you learn to join your body movements to the energetic wind in your field and ride it like a metaphorical celestial dragon. Eventually, the skill begins to flow between either piggy-backing the natural chi that arises in the air of the environment or to deliberately engender winds of chi to flow in specific ways within your body and piggy-back your physical movements off of them.

As your physical nerves and your internal senses become more sensitive, you can use them to become more sensitive to the chi inside your body. Just as you can make your legs sensitive to the air as you Walk the Circle, you can make your feet sensitive to what they feel as they contact the ground: initial contact, sliding forward and grabbing and holding the ground.
Because bagua has a very yang energetic quality, many falsely presuppose the corollary that if people get extremely yang, they must be very insensitive. This stereotype of testosterone-driven, very macho-type men being very insensitive is often reinforced in the media. Well, it ain’t necessarily so! In bagua, the stronger your yang chi gets, the more sensitive you should get. This is essential to the principle of balancing yin and yang—the counterbalance. It's the other side of the yang that practitioners deliberately seek to acquire.

**BAGUA PLAYS WITH ETHERIC ENERGIES:**

**THUNDER TRIGRAM**

*When the energetic winds blow very strongly, they create within them a kind of chi that could be compared to static electricity. If swirled in certain ways, it can be influenced to erupt into lightening. In the eight ways of practicing the Single Palm Change, Thunder can be induced for very powerful shaking and vibration-like explosions within the physical body. The procedure for becoming sensitive to and using the electric, energetic quality of this kind of chi follows a similar path to that of wind. Both are also used in meditation to uncover, loosen up and resolve blockages in all eight energy bodies. Thunder shakes all under heaven and earth after which the gentle rain falls and all grows anew in heaven and earth.*
Mental Principles

The emphasis in bagua and tai chi is awareness and subtlety over brute or mental force. A smooth, steady and continuous stream of awareness and consciousness is what should motivate everything in your movements from the physical to the energetic. Intent may be of the ordinary variety or that of the Heart-Mind and goes through three primary stages.

Stage 1: Ordinary Intent

Ordinary intent is used to cross a room. You initially project your intent to where you want to go. This causes everything needed in your body to get there to mobilize according to the needs of your intent. Or, if you want to put pen to paper, after having had the intent of what to write, your hand goes to the paper and starts writing. The intent process starts and very shortly or instantaneously mobilizes everything required to actualize the intent. If your hand is on your chest and you wish to put it forward in front of you, you must first project your intent where you want your hand to go. Almost simultaneously your hand arrives at the designated destination.

A basic principle of chi states that the intent moves the chi, which motivates and enables the physical movement. In bagua and tai chi, the deliberate use of conscious, relaxed intent becomes the source that creates your movements—not only conscious or unconscious muscular reflexes, no matter how well-trained and finely honed.

Intent is of two kinds: the ordinary intellectual type or the extraordinary kind of the Heart-Mind. The intent you should use in bagua and tai chi should always be relaxed, fluid and continuous, and not tense, forced or intermittent—regardless if employed for longer or shorter times.

Ordinary intent is partial. It is derived from the part of our brain or mind through which we use to manipulate symbols or practice logic and mathematics. It is the
part of us we use to activate force of will. Activating ordinary intent is the first stage of practicing bagua well.

**Stage 2: Relaxed Intent**

Here, you learn to rely on relaxed intent and seek to completely abandon any use of brute mental force to drive physical actions. You use very relaxed, but concentrated intent to tell your body to move until it’s enough to accomplish the task. If you want to get your arm to move, you cease to rely on needing to tense your muscles to have them push your hand out into space.

**Stage 3: The Heart-Mind**

All forms of intent ultimately derive either from ordinary intent or the Heart-Mind. In stage three, you learn to use the Heart-Mind instead of ordinary intent to accomplish all your movements without tension at any level of the mind or body. To activate what is called the chi of the Heart-Mind, you must ask and experientially answer well a very subjective question: Where and from what does my ordinary intent arise moment by moment?

When you find the answer, you have found your own Heart-Mind.

The Heart-Mind comes from an open dimension. Although it lacks concrete formed thoughts, it is the amorphous center from where impulse for a thought to come into existence lives. It’s the nonspecific birthing room for your thoughts, which does not have concrete thoughts of its own, but rather produces thoughts out of it.

In bagua, you have the sense inside that when the Heart-Mind begins to arise your body is already midway into the move or already having finished it. You move as that sense of the Heart-Mind is arising rather than first obtaining the sense and next, after some lag time, perform the move.
Cultivate a Smooth and Seamless Continuum

While you are Circle Walking the sense of whatever is happening within your mind should be smooth and seamless until its point of focus changes. As mind continuously changes its focus, it should flow between this and that without resistance. Then, again, it becomes just as smooth and seamless as you turn and walk in the opposite direction.

This smooth and seamless pattern is continuously repeated regardless of the various body rhythms used while Walking the Circle or reversing direction. Bagua, when taught by masters, has many external and internal body and chi rhythms, tempos and beats that change as your movements alternate between moving faster and slower. All these are determined and governed by the quality of your state of mind, which enables you to change smoothly and seamlessly.

Make Your Movements become an Extension of Your Intent

Bagua, like tai chi, is a thinking person’s game where thought or intent initiates your physical actions and fuses with your movements. Your movements become an extension of your intent. In effect, you create an idea and then actualize it through your movements, rather than the movement starting and being followed by thoughts. This is why you can move and change as fast as your intent can be generated once your body is sufficiently trained. Eventually, the faster your intent can be generated and change, so can your internal energy flow to create physical movements.

Lengthen the Mind

Lengthening the body and the mind are parallel principles in the Taoist way of thinking. Your mind should continuously extend without breaks. When
walking, this sense of your mind should be that it always stably extends out without contracting into itself.

Lengthening the mind occurs not only when you look through your finger into space during the Single Palm Change, but also in terms of your mind. It moves through your physical tissues and into your chi within your body and to the end of your etheric field. It’s no different than the principle in tai chi where the mind should flow without interruption like a long river, such as China’s Yangtze that runs on for thousands of miles, continuing, never stopping, always surging on.

Your intention has to expand while maintaining relaxed focus on multiple tasks. As this occurs the ability of the mind to maintain awareness on an increasing number of variables without exerting effort begins to increase. It should keep on expanding into larger and more open fields of awareness, where everything within that awareness is connected to everything else. This is the opposite of what is classically called the nature of the monkey mind. Here the mind jumps like a monkey swinging from tree to tree. It is unable to rest upon and engage with any task comfortably as it bounces like a ping-pong ball from one place to another.

This lengthening is spherical in nature. It is not a hyper focus on one aspect while losing sight of everything else. In bagua and tai chi your field of awareness should keep on opening until you’re aware of everything within the field as one integrated whole and not a series of alternating disjointed parts.

**Put Your Mind inside Your Body**

You must be able to put your mind inside your body. What does that mean? While looking externally and Walking the Circle you should be able to feel the inside of your body. Some part of your conscious mind (although not necessarily all of it) must be absolutely cognizant of what you’re doing inside and below the surface of every physical part within your entire bag of skin (spine, lower tantien, legs, joints, cavities, muscles, etc.).
In terms of human perception, like the directions of the *I Ching*, there’s always up-down, left-right, in-out, inside-outside—both inside your body and externally.

For example, in one training method. As two bagua practitioners *Walk the Circle*, each positioned on opposite sides of the circle, they must maintain awareness of many internal and external techniques simultaneously. The practitioners each:

- Look at their index finger and the other person.
- Have an internal sense of being still.
- Focus on clearly seeing the other person while everything around that person seems to be moving faster and faster as the speed of their walking increases.
- Simultaneously feel how the motions of their body parts are moving inside of their own body—for example, their spine, internal organs, body alignments and everything else related to the sixteen neigong—as best as they can.

This all requires multitasking of subtle awareness.

**Become Aware of Multitasking**

This multitasking of awareness can only happen through a deep relaxation. When it occurs a kind of internal coordination naturally arises that allows you to recognize many layers simultaneously.

In one sense, this is no different than driving a car: you steer the car, interpret road signs, watch and respond to the flow of traffic, look at the road, drink a cup of coffee, listen to the radio, intermittently glancing at the rear view mirror and possibly even have a conversation of some depth about important subjects.

In bagua, internal and external multitasking becomes possible when you practice and relax enough into the environment within your own body and mind. When you do all of a sudden your field of awareness pops open. This is what
allows you to perform more functions at once and fairly effortlessly. In one sense practicing bagua regularly is preparation for a world where multitasking is more the norm than the exception.

**Move beyond Time**

If you Walk the Circle well, you move into a timeless realm. You move into a place where time as you normally know it either ceases to exist or completely loses its ability to destabilize your mind. Time is more of a human creation than a real thing. When your mind and awareness expand enough, the sense of linear time disappears.

With enough practice this happens organically of its own accord rather than being an event you try to make happen. Lengthening of the mind eventually results in timelessness. Opening of the field of awareness ultimately results in timelessness.

The nature of linear time is like a monkey jumping from tree to tree. Genuine, relaxed focus eliminates linear time as we typically experience it. In a sense, time is a mere mental construct.

*Once the mind really opens up in a true meditative state, there’s no sense of time. In terms of spiritually, time truly doesn’t exist.*

Hope you enjoy the program.