



## Form / Function / Energy

### Form

Forms are not individual movements. Forms are energetic changes between movements like the wind blowing through a leaf covered tree. The leaves and the tree branches are moved by the wind's energy in virtually limitless movement combinations. Do not let yourself become trapped or limited by the "form" or pattern, just understand the guiding foundation of the movements or the internal structure of the form. At an advanced stage, this will allow you to freely express the style of movement you are practicing, regardless of the "style." Of course, you need to "truly understand" the system and the pattern of movements to be able to freely express the energy behind these sets of movements or forms.

Those energetic changes that fill the void between the finished postures are the essence of application. It is within these transitions that you must be most aware of your structure to maintain the control of your balance, timing, coordination and quality of your movement, as well as the root from which it is generated. Placement of your stances and the position of your transitional movements should coordinate with the decisions you make in stance transitions. This includes your single and double windmills or just moving from strike to strike with long or short type movements. The slightest change in angle or

direction should change the intent that you are projecting. As I've mentioned before, all of these "movements" are energy and transitions into the next expression of energy and can represent anything your intention can project. Within true application this can represent any number of throws, strikes, locks, leverages- anything. You just need to understand both the expanding and contracting energy within the movements. So ultimately, you do need to have a picture in your mind of what you are intending to accomplish. When learning the forms you should always be told the tools and the targets to coordinate the movement and intention. There are multiple reasons for this. You not only learn the numerous tools utilized within that particular art but also the anatomical targeting and angles to maximize the movement's effectiveness. Proper form practice also helps to create the balance, timing and coordination needed to properly control your movements and angles.

The use of weapons does not give you any leeway; it will actually magnify errors in your movement. Refinement of structure and quality of footwork becomes even more important. The structural connection and control of your base becomes crucial. Coordinating the upper body with the lower base is difficult to do well and it truly comes down to how in depth and how correctly you have trained your basics and solidified this "connection." You cannot blindly go through the exercises and related basics. There must be focused intention combined with properly executed physical movement. This requires that you have the proper muscle memory responding to the commands of the brain. These commands run both ways, to AND FROM the nerve endings. Your brain can tell your body to turn while driving a golf ball and drive with your legs, to keep your eyes on the ball, make good square contact, etc. But unless a good coach has corrected any improper physical actions and you have repeated "the correct movements" thousands of times, you will definitely be inconsistent at best! Master Amy Tong would often say to me, "Use your mind to relax your body." This is something

that requires your mind to be in the right place and your body to be coached to do the right things. So when your mind tells your body to relax or to move in a certain way, it has memory of the correct posture, structure, positioning, etc. and can truly feel the internal aspect of the body and relax into the joint spaces. With many repetitions of the correct movement, the body will learn to move into position correctly with less "conscious" and focused thought. There will likely never be 100% consistency or "flawless" movement or technique but the challenge is to minimize the inconsistencies.

Jimmy used to tell me that, "if you can't train, see yourself training." You need to be able to "see yourself" making the necessary action to defend yourself, or performing the "proper" form movements with the necessary expression of tools and intention. Slowing down and focusing on correctness and the "feel" of the technique or movement series is imperative to training the body to respond correctly. When you train forms, always work for completion of each movement. Completion can mean, not over extending or over rotating as well as not cutting movements short due to an over expression of speed and power. Be sure to express your "tools" and your "intention" so that it is clear what you are intending to express. At times, this can be very subtle. If the watching eye is not trained as to what to look for, it may escape the viewer. There is a principal of training to the foot, then to the inch, then to the fraction of an inch and eventually to the millimeter and even finer. This principal of training supersedes style of martial practice. Contemplate and focus on the single grain of rice, not the whole bowl with all the rest of the meal. It is perfecting the small that makes all else in your development rise above the basic levels of achievement. It is truly up to the practitioner as to what level of training they choose to be satisfied with.

With the thought of proper form practice, the question I would ask would be, "how do you train or practice when you are not at the studio or on the floor at the school." Do you have the tools to make your personal practice effective and efficient? If not, your personal training will suffer and your growth will stagnate at a certain point. The good thing is, if you keep in a mindset of growth and improvement and have the resources at your disposal, you can add these fundamental concepts of form practice to your private work out. Weapons practice (though not practical in today's society) can and will bring more depth and precision to your training. As stated earlier, you cannot hide behind a weapon; it will magnify your errors in movement quality. Besides, this type of training is a major part of "the art" as a whole. Expansion can also apply to expanding the depth of knowledge obtained within the art you have chosen to spend your time and energy learning.

### **Function**

As I've stated before in previous writings, your awareness and mindfulness of any given situation will "allow" you to "off balance" someone, in any number of ways. "Off balancing" someone takes on many different levels. This can be physiologically, energetically as well as psychologically. To "uproot" someone or to "move or hold" someone off balance is much the same but also very different. The idea of "off balancing" someone always remains the optimal principal. Before you can "uproot" someone, you first must "off balance" them or "allow them" to off balance themselves before you can utilize any kind of control, destruction or both. You can hold someone "up" and off balance but you can also compress them into their own structure. Utilizing cross angles, you can hold them off balance just as effectively. This depends on "how" you get them there. Also, that you do not move them "into" their structure but off balance while continuing to move

them off balance. Many times when students only push and pull with their hands, or stop rotating the shoulder and waist, it sets the opponent back on balance. This is what I like to call giving it back to them instead of continuing to take it (their balance) away from them. Never stop your rotation, even if the person falls out of your throw or leverage half way through the application. If you stop your rotation you will surely present your “soft side” which makes you become off balance and easily taken down or unable to deliver the proper dynamics to your technique. Complete your movement and finish your stance with your shoulder turned and your hip dropped into position, regardless of where the individual hits the ground. This puts you in your “strong side” which also allows you to kneel if needed to add rotation or to maintain a rooted position.

The improper use of the tools, targeting and technique within the form, as well as the unnecessary use of speed and power can cause an incomplete expression of the form as well as within the functionality. Within the function it is important to remember that it’s not about impact but more about penetration and proper targeting. You don’t need to go hard and fast you just need to make good contact to the proper target with the correct tool and utilizing the proper angles for optimal penetration to the target. Trying to go hard and fast usually puts you out of position. In forms instruction, I will try to get students to practice in the same manner as they would use the movements for the San Soo aspect of training. This will relate to the timing and coordination of your upper and lower body and the intention placed on the movements.

We talk a lot about (what really should be) the focus of training, Timing, Balance and Coordination. These aspects of movement are the core of what is commonly misunderstood as speed and power. Let me add some additional thoughts to this.

TIMING= Awareness / Preparation / Cadence

BALANCE= Form--Function / Structure--Alignment

COORDINATION= Upper—lower / Inner—Outer / Thought--Action

All of the above can and will be elevated through "proper" form practice and complete understanding of fundamentals. It is fundamental in any practice to not just understand the basics but to practice them so that when you move reactively or even consciously, your body moves into the correct structure/alignment having properly done so tens of thousands of times in correct practice. Utilizing your awareness to prepare and position yourself in proper structure and alignment and controlling your inner energy and outer expression, your "thought and action" should be as one. As Jimmy used to say to me, "by the time my mind says to hit him, it's already done," or if your intuition tells you to retreat or evade if possible, you can do so effectively. The classic writings say to not advance when an opening appears is a lost opportunity. To not retreat when it's called for is foolish and will lead to defeat. In all stages of training, it is crucial to apply these principals of timing, balance and coordination. Speed and power will not be there when you need it if these three things are lacking. Jimmy always told us, "slow down, speed will be there when you need it." The slowing down to train correctly will allow this statement to be true as you are training your body to respond "correctly" to what your mind is asking it to do.

Predators have the instinct and awareness to "set you up or bait you!" This is 100% a two way road. But this can only happen if YOU put yourself in a mindset of a predator and not a sheep. Wolves eat sheep. This does not mean you have to predate but only that you are not presenting yourself as prey. Predators can see and sense this and will likely pick an easier target.

The idea that you would need to "prove" to someone else that you are better or more skilled is not only foolish but will almost always put you in a position of disadvantage. For the predator, the not knowing is their downfall. Problem is, you need to know they are there and be aware of "your" situation at hand. This will allow you to prepare and position yourself and your loved ones to advance or retreat if necessary, that is, unless you present your ego and not your awareness. This applies to knowing where exits and staircases are and where front and back doors are relative to your position in a diner or restaurant. Also by making an assessment of a parking lot or structure before entering or exiting your car, you can avoid a conflict or an assault. If the time comes for you to "use yourself," it would be to your advantage to use EVERYTHING that "yourself" has to offer. Remember, it's surviving and not winning that dictates real combat and not sport.

### Energy

When you speak of energy, you can go to many extremes. If you look up the word you will find a number of types of energies and explanations of their source. For example, we can speak of transitional, kinetic, rotational, electromagnetic, vibration and so on. In martial art or most any physical practice, you will likely be utilizing several of the known energy sources. The level in which these are utilized will be relevant to the level of coaching received and quality of training. In martial practice, kinetic, rotational, vibration and electromagnetic energies are all used, if the training has been substantial and consistent.

Bong is a term used for ground energy transferred from the earth into the body through proper utilization of your stances and foot work as well as the intention of grounding the body and rooting. Learning to sense "Qi" or life force in the body and directing it is something that

takes many years of diligent practice. The yang energy of the heavens and the yin energy of the earth can combine to form universal Qi. When “drawing” the Qi to the body and directing it with the mind's intent, it will become a very physical manifestation of electromagnetic energy and vibration. At the lower levels of martial practice, it is all too common for the “ego” to get in the way of the idea of and the actual reality of the development, attraction and manifestation of energies, both outside and inside the body. But this ego barrier does not make these very real concepts (that have been written and spoken about by the most brilliant minds in science) any less valid. When I teach the concept of 9-pearls to students, it is more simply explained by pointing out where the power is generated and then where it is controlled and finally where it is expressed or released. This can be explained in depth but just understanding this concept at its core will raise the level of your practice substantially. This energy travels in both directions, up and out and also down and into the ground. Curiously though, in practice the energy (or intent of release) should always move down and in as the thought (or intention) of up and out almost always will uproot or unbalance the issuer.

Relaxation of the body with attention to the joint spaces is crucial to sensing and directing energy flow. There is a very drastic difference between holding and releasing energy to its full potential. You must be relaxed. It makes sense that if you tighten your body in any way, you are “using” energy or strength to do this. This then is power or energy that is already in use and cannot be properly released. I will sometimes call this “carrying” your energy. To give an example; it would be like using the strength necessary to pick up a moderately heavy box and then choosing to hold it up and out, away from your core. Forcing the body to “carry” and hold it up, rather than picking it up, then relaxing and letting the weight sink into the legs and the ground then utilizing only the strength “necessary” to support its weight.



Stretch out your energy, squeeze your energy inward and begin to cycle this pattern of inward and outward expansion and contraction. Expansion and contraction play a big part in this but it must be trained to be done from a relaxed state. Do not use muscle but instead, use your mind (intent) combined with properly executed patterns of movement as well as proper body alignment and structure. The effect this type of practice has (over long periods of time) on the body's ability to project energy and vibration is beyond explanation. You must train the ability to "feel" and not "force" these expressions of energy. You will always need to use some muscle to engage the structure to expand and contract but you need to train to minimize this and return to the relaxed state. Power or energy will then issue from the "whole" of the body rather than a smaller part of the whole. With this, receiving and issuing energy becomes a product of an instant, virtually one in the same. How you receive and or issue energy falls to form and function as well as intent but all of these things are a product of energy.

Anything that has the capability of oscillation also has the capability of vibration. Like a tuning fork that you wave in the air and nothing happens, yet strike it against your hand and it begins to vibrate from the fast oscillation of the fork creating sound waves. Just like the human voice that sends vibration out as sound resonance that the ear receives and the brain processes. The human body has that same ability through opening and closing the joint spaces causing the body to oscillate and vibrate. Through repetitious training, this can be controlled and issued through the extremities.

Reaching outward with your intention is another, completely different expression. Thoughts are vibration and are sent outward to the universe. To the initiated and trained, these can be felt and therefore acted upon. When confrontation is thought to be eminent, to hide your intentions is the best path to survival. There are other times when projecting your intent can let those that may be stalking or simply positioning themselves (to attempt to victimize you or your family)

know that you are a lion and not a sheep. Stopping or avoiding a violent confrontation is always the better choice.

Rotational energy is commonly referred to as circular motion. This is of course the most basic way to describe such a dynamic force. We deal with a limitless number of circular angles when you are looking at body movement. Visualize a sphere or a ball and think of all the individual circles and different circular angles that it would take to complete this sphere or ball. Contemplate how the energy of circular movement expands from the center of the circle outward to the expanse of the outer edge of the spent rotation. Like a tornado or hurricane, there is calm at the center and extreme violence reaching out to the outer edge. The result lies in the outer edge but the true power generates from the small circles at the core. You must think hard about this concept to grasp its meaning. The combination of positioning, rotation, proper timing and coordination of leg drive can help create the proper angle for the correct release of energy for striking, throwing, locking and all other aspects of application. It is crucial to apply all the previously discussed aspects of proper structure to avoid injuring yourself while applying these energies. A lifetime can be spent on mastering any one of these aspects of energy work but the time you spend in stillness and balancing the center calm with the outward expression of movement will be well worth the rewards in self-actualization and realization of your connection to the universe and the energies surrounding and comprising all things.

Socrates was quoted saying "The unexamined life is not worth living." You must continue to strive to be better today than you were yesterday and "truly" examine yourself. This will help to keep you in a mindset of growth and improvement. "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an action but a habit." I would be leery of individuals who claim "to have it" or to be obviously content with their perceived achievements. The ones who truly reach a higher level of practice in any field are the ones who are continually striving for growth and

improvement. The possibilities are endless and the only limitations are the ones we place on ourselves.

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