

Introduction

Forest Dragon Exercises



Dreaming of Immortality, T'ang Yin, Ming Dynasty

For centuries, civilizations have dreamed of immortality. Ancient cultures from China to Egypt have strived to prolong their lifespan or even to avoid death completely. There are countless manuscripts describing methods of purifying the body in an effort to evade this ultimate fate. Legends have emerged of masters who withdrew from civilization to live a life of isolation in pursuit of this elusive goal. Perhaps the most famous of these was a Chinese martial artist and herbalist by the name of Lǐ Qīngyún who lived to the age of 197, although some claimed he was actually 256 when he died in 1933.

Certainly there are many factors that may contribute to a prolonged lifespan and many factors that will shorten it. A good diet and regular exercise combined with a healthy lifestyle are key to a long life and a life worth living. By providing a structure of daily exercise, the Forest Dragon Exercises attempt to make life better and longer for anyone who cares to practice them.

This book is a training manual and a reference for students, which will provide a reference for the student. No book can serve as a replacement for a qualified teacher. There are many qualified teachers of Pai Lum, including the instructors of the Forest Dragon School. The principles of exercise, training, and human physiology are the same regardless of the method of training employed. Therefore, any qualified teacher will be able to use this book as a tool to be used as an aid in training.

Some of the exercises in this book are derived directly from yoga. The postures have been adapted to fit specific purposes and may not always reflect the way they might be practiced in any particular school of yoga, but they closely resemble the original yogic posture and in many cases are identical. Where applicable, the names for the yoga postures are provided on the right side of the page in both English and Sanskrit as a reference. Although it is not necessary to learn the Sanskrit names for the postures or the yogic methods, some may find it interesting to know more about the historic origins of

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these exercises, which are thousands of years old, perhaps the oldest exercises still practiced today.

There are many systems of physical exercise and many have been developed for specific purposes. Some are developed specifically to develop one's ability as a golfer or a fighter. People who want to be a champion swimmer or a professional football player may have a personal trainer who coaches them on how best to increase the specific skills necessary for that sport, focusing on maximizing their strength, developing muscle tone and speed, or developing their endurance.

Pai Lum focuses on all of these and it focuses on none of these. We develop strength but don't focus on it. We develop endurance but don't focus on it. The same is true of flexibility, speed, and coordination. It is left to the individual to focus on whatever is important to them.

What is Pai Lum?

Pai Lum is not a specific set of exercises or movements – it is a way of moving. It is not characterized by one technique or another – it is a way of fighting. Pai Lum is a way of thinking – a way of living. This is the essence of Pai Lum.

Pai Li Lung gave the following answer to the question “What is Pai Lum?”

To answer this question in a few short sentences is almost impossible. It may even take a book full of writing to do the definition justice. But in any event, I shall try.

The thoughts and definitions contained herein are my personal feelings, and understandings based on my personal journey through Pai Lum.

Pai Lum is a martial art.

Pai Lum is a way of life.

Pai Lum is a self defense.

Pai Lum is a philosophy.

Pai Lum is an exercise.

Pai Lum is nature.

Gee, maybe it won't take a book full of writing!

For the beginner (first ten years of training) one should focus entirely on basics. This includes basic fighting techniques, theories, and concepts, basic health techniques, both internal, external, and the basic philosophy of Pai Lum.

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A beginner should learn how to construct the basic techniques, the mechanics of executing the techniques, and the basic striking points on which to apply the techniques. This method of learning may appear to be slow, but a good understanding of the purpose and function of techniques is essential for the mind to accept that technique and allow it to work.

Pai Lum for the beginner starts with practice and repetition. In order for the mind to accept and understand a technique, it must be thoroughly familiar with that technique. It must be friends with it. It must know it as one knows the neighborhood one grew up in; all the back alleys and shortcuts, where to go and where no to go.

When the mind gets this familiar with a technique, it accepts it and uses it without thinking when the need arises.

So remember, what the mind accepts, the body must do.

And this is accomplished through:

Repetition

Repetition

Repetition

I always tell my students that when they become sick and tired of doing a technique, they are probably beginning to master it, and their real training is just beginning. It is essential to master your basics because advanced Pai Lum is basics combined and applied without thinking as a situation calls for it.

Now, since we realize that there is a lot of physical practice for the beginner, we must also realize that the philosophy of Pai Lum is found through that physical training. The motions and positions cause the mind to see and understand the true nature of being and why things are the way they are.

Truth is not what someone tells you it is. It is what it is. This becomes apparent throughout the physical practice of Pai Lum.

I would like to interject a thought at this point. I believe Pai Lum to be a unique and individual art that is not like any other. Sometimes it might appear to be similar to other arts, but that is usually an intentional illusion; "illusion structure" as Lung would say. It has a deeper truth to it and causes each practitioner to be able to make it work in their own way, quite unusual and hard to explain if you haven't experienced it. That is what Grandmaster Pai brought to the students, and this is why they may do the same technique, but appear to be different. Pai Lum is not a technique, it is a way of doing technique.

In order for Pai Lum to continue for the next generations, it must rise above any individual. To do that, the responsibility is given to me by Lung, I have established a system of progressive learning.

It starts at the very beginning, and slowly takes a student on a journey towards mastering this art in an orderly and reasonable manner.

Things are learned when they should be learned, not before or after. You start at the beginning and continue to add things to your learning so that you progress smoothly from beginner, to intermediate, to advanced level until you simply realize you are a practitioner of Pai Lum.

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There are no tests, sashes, or titles. The only exception is in teaching. You must be given permission to instruct by your teacher and license to teach by your teacher.

I believe that the true study of Pai Lum is to reach a level of “egolessness”. How can we do this if ego-promoting ranks and titles are used? It may look good on paper, but in application, it does not seem to work Grandmaster Pai said “I do not call myself a master”, neither should we. If someone recognizes your achievements, and acknowledges them by calling you by a title, the humility learned in practice should cause you to continue training and not go on an ego trip. In other words, I know how much I don’t know. Remember, skill is relative. A beginner might think you are a master, but your teacher thinks you need more work and practice. It’s relative to who’s watching you.

There was an old Tai Chi master who would cry whenever he did his form. When asked why, he said, “I’ve been doing this for 70 years, and it’s still not right.” So let us not think we are that good, we still need improvement. If you are a senior, humbly help those under you, don’t gloat in your achievements and you will truly be masterful.

Now, on with the Journey!

About This Book

Over the past 100 years the world has changed greatly. We enjoy many improvements to our life, but it does not come without a cost – greater distractions and less time. Most people today do not have the time to dedicate long hours of practice to learn and master the martial arts or even to adhere to a regular exercise regimen. I began developing the exercises that I call Forest Dragon exercises in 2000 to introduce students to the fundamentals of Pai Lum Kung Fu using a core set of exercises and techniques which can be practiced daily in a small amount of time. Needless to say, the more time one can devote to exercise and practice, the better the results and the more proficient they will become.

This book is the first in a series of five which contains all of the fundamental exercises, including breathing exercises, yoga postures, stances, basic kicks, strikes, and blocks in the form of fighting sequences which will give a student everything he needs to begin the practice of Pai Lum.

Many people ask whether Pai Lum is a “hard” style or a “soft” style. Japanese and Okinawan karate are examples of hard styles because of the crisp, linear movements. Many Chinese styles, but not all, are considered soft styles due to their circular movements which gives them a softer appearance. The beginning phases of Pai Lum Kung Fu are made up of what many people today call Kenpo, or Kempo, or *quan fa* in Chinese. Quan fa means “way of the fist”, “law of the fist”, or just simply “fist way”. Quan fa can be regarded as the basics of kung fu, which will become evident in this first book, phase one of the Forest Dragon exercises.

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In the next three phases, the student will be introduced to concepts which go beyond the more simple principles and in the fifth phase the student is introduced to the basic concepts of tai chi. Tai chi represents the other end of the spectrum from quan fa. It can be regarded as the final phase of an introduction to Pai Lum, which is to say the student is finally well on their way to a lifetime of learning.

The intent of this book is not to replace the teacher, but to provide a tool which can be used as a reference for the student. This book assumes that the student has a qualified instructor to teach them the correct execution of stances, punches, kicks, and other techniques. The movements and sequences can be learned without a teacher if the aim is to gain the benefits to one's physical and mental health. This will provide a basis which can be built upon by a teacher for those who may wish to continue their study of kung fu more seriously and gain a better understanding of Pai Lum and its combative aspects.

Students often ask which style of martial art is best or whether one school is better than another. There is an old adage in the martial arts,

“There are many paths which lead to the top of the mountain. Whichever path you take, the view at the top is the same.”

It is true that there is no single path that is better than the rest; however, not all paths lead to the top of the mountain. Some paths lead in the wrong direction – away from the top of the mountain. And some paths lead deep into the forest where you will remain – lost forever. Whichever path you may choose, find a teacher who will keep you on the right path and help you find your way upward.