

# PIERCING PALM POINTERS

By Lewis Paleias

PIERCING OR BORING PALM (CHUAN ZHAN) CONTAINS FOUR BASIC MOVEMENTS: RISE, DRILL, OVERTURN AND FALL, WHICH ARE INHERENT IN ALL INTERNAL EMPTY-HAND FORMS AND TECHNIQUES

To most spectators at martial arts exhibitions, it's not hard to distinguish the various styles of Chinese internal martial arts from each other. The soft flow of tai chi chuan, the explosive directness of xing-yi chuan or the circling and directional changes of bagua zhang are easily apparent. If, however, you have ever read the classic treatises of these three major internal martial arts you will be amazed to find that they all say basically the same thing—relying on sound internal principles, structure, relaxation, energy and going with the flow.

The common ground shared by all these arts are relaxed, natural approaches to fighting, weight shift and balance principles, and whole body power directed from the waist. This power is maintained throughout defense and counterattack maneuvers through the concept of rooting and the use of a central governing position in the lower torso (dan tian) that coordinates movement and power. The energy in the body's center is kept as a coiled spring—relaxed yet tenacious. Through this "springiness" the body maintains the ability to conform and respond instantaneously to an attack in a totally interconnected manner instead of utilizing moves or limbs in isolation.

The foundation of learning to use these systems as "fighting arts" is laid with fundamental practice drills, both single and two-person sets that help develop attributes, such as distancing, timing, rhythm, strength, line of attack and angle familiarization. These are attributes that cannot be fully developed in solo form practice.

Unfortunately, many practitioners today question whether these drills are productive. Some practitioners maintain that "drills are not fighting" ("chi sau is not fighting, pushing hands is not fighting, breaking bricks is not..."). They just fill time with useless fluff." I doubt any real teacher would ever equate learning drills with actual fighting, yet without them you have little chance of programming complex motor skills into your neuromuscular memory. Taught properly, both pushing hands and chi sau can teach you how to bridge the gap, adhere, neutralize, attack and if you can break a couple of slabs of concrete (like my otherwise peaceful friend Damian Fedorko) with a hand slap you could probably end a fight quickly if you manage to find a target.

All my teachers (all skilled in fighting ability) handed down a variety of different drills to help pass on both combative and developmental aspects of their arts. Repetitions are also needed to insure correct body mechanics and create the roots of internal power. Drills are often the best way to get the desired repetitions in the shortest amount of time. Just as important, they are a lot of fun to do (if it wasn't fun most of us would have left these lifelong arts a long time ago).

My teacher and friend, Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming, suggested that if I write articles they should give readers some "meat," that is, fundamental principles and exercises that they can put into practice regardless of their style. I've chosen three basic movements that are fundamental to all the internal arts: piercing palm, chopping palm and shaking palm (the last two will be discussed in a future article).

## Piercing & Overturning Palm

Piercing or boring palm (chuan zhan), like all palm/fist skills in the internal arts, contains four basic movements: rise, drill, overturn and fall. These movements are basic to all others and form the fundamental power expressed in all these arts. All three Chinese internal martial arts (tai chi, xing-yi and bagua) use these same body/arm mechanics throughout their forms, two-person sets and martial tactics.



**CONTINUOUS FLOW EXERCISE**  
The author intercepts Ken Blue's right attack with his right (1). He overturns his right and pulls Ken, while attacking with a left (2). He overturns his left and cross-steps to a better position—cross hands (3). He attacks with a right palm to the chest while locking Ken's arm (4). He follows by breaking Ken's elbow or starting a throw (5), then changes to a palm strike to the temple (6).

### FROM THE INSIDE

The easiest way to get the push/pull feel of the "rise, drill, overturn and fall" mechanics is through the following drill: (1) Stand comfortably with feet a little wider than a shoulder-width apart, knees relaxed and feet in the pigeon-toed ba stance (1). Drill the left hand palm-up along the centerline of the body around face height; your right hand is in front of your right hip in a loose palm-down grabbing shape. (2) The left forward hand overturns as the fingers close in a grabbing action (2). As the left hand pulls back and down toward the left hip (3) and the right hand simultaneously pierces forward and drills palm-up along the centerline of the body (4). Xing-yi practitioners recognize this exercise as part of their drilling (zuan chuan) and splitting (pi chuan) exercises.

### FROM THE OUTSIDE

Stand comfortably as before with hands in the "guard-stance" posture, eyes looking through the hole between the thumb and index finger; lower hand under the elbow of the top arm (5). Both hands begin to twist palms up as the lower hand begins to slide from in front of the elbow of the upper arm along the outside forearm (6). Once the lower palm reaches the upper palm, the upper palm starts pulling back and down; the lower palm pierces out to be the upper palm (7). The hands continue overturning until the "guard stance" posture is completed. In both exercises the body swivels back and forth around its central axis as the palms change (8). You should try and rotate the hips a full 45 degrees with each palm change. Bagua practitioners perform this exercise as part of learning the mechanics of the single palm change.

### PIERCING & OVERTURNING IN TAI CHI

Like the other internal arts, the movements of "rise & drill, overturn & fall" are inherent throughout the tai chi form. For example, take wardoff (peng) and rollback (lu), the quintessential energies of tai chi. Anytime you use your arm to push something away its called peng. Lu means to lead or pull someone down and back. (A) Prepare for peng by rotating your body to the left with your left arm raised and your right arm under it like you're holding a large ball at your left side. (B) Shift from the rear weighted 60/40 stance to a Bow and Arrow stance (30/70), while rotating your body forward, raising your right arm and lowering your left. (C) Release your chest while dropping your right elbow, with the fingers of your left hand touching the right inner forearm. (D) Push from your back leg and pierce both arms forward and up. (E) Lu. Circle your right hand clockwise. Start overturning your palms as you (F) shift your weight to the rear in a 40/60 stance, while turning your body to pull your arms down and back toward your left side. Tai chi players routinely perform this exercise (along with press and push) as part of their peng, lu, gi and an routine.

When practicing these exercises the movements should be performed smoothly and slowly in a "mindful" way (like

qigong). This is not an arm exercise: the whole body is involved, starting with the power being generated from the legs and the turning of the waist. You should feel that the pulling hand initiates the piercing hand to go forward. After developing smoothness and whole-body connection, the next step is to add the attribute of speed. Only when you've achieved these fundamental attributes do you work on "fajing": explosive power.

### BASIC PARTNER EXERCISE

This first exercise is a basic drill to work out the mechanics of using this palm from outside your partner's arm. As one partner punches, pierces or reaches forward with his right arm, the other player will intercept it by thrusting his opposite (right) arm forward, palm ending up. You should intercept your partner's arm (on the outside) before your arm reaches its full rotation or full extension.



**PARTNER EXERCISE FROM THE INSIDE**  
The author intercepts Ken Blue's right-hand attack with his left "rise and drill" pierce from the inside of his arm (1). His left "overturn and fall" unbalances him to his left rear, while his right hand follows the action and strikes the inside targets (2).

head, ear, neck, shoulder, arm or back.

### FROM THE OPPONENT'S INSIDE

This is similar to the last exercise, but performed from the inside of your partner's arm. In this case you intercept your partner's right attack with your left arm, overturn, slide and pull him at a 45-degree angle to his outside and unbalance him to your left side. When you perfect this movement you can add the simultaneous right-arm attack as your right palm follows the motion of your waist and strikes the inside targets of the face, neck, torso, or inner arm. You can then proceed to movement: pivoting, stepping, follow-up techniques, etc., to instill other attributes into your neural network. You can also use different hand forms, such as a phoenix eye or xing-yi's drilling fist.

### CONTINUOUS FLOW AND CHANGE

Once you can perform these simple exercises smoothly with stepping patterns, you can start working on developing the attributes of continuous flow and the ability to change your attacks and defense without getting "stuck." At first, limit yourself to one or two techniques. When you get stuck, stop and try to work out a better response, one that brings back the attribute of "continuous flow." It soon will resemble a short two-person form.

I was once told, "if, in a serious altercation, you and your adversary throw more than three techniques and you're both

still standing, your kung-fu is so bad that you should run away from each other in shame." If that's truly the case, maybe drill work to enhance your deficient attributes will do the trick. ☯

Lewis Paleias is a coach instructor for Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming and teaches qigong, tai chi, xing-yi and bagua in New York City and South Florida. He is also an open hand control, compliance and escort/expandable baton-trainer for various security forces. He can be reached via [www.cloudchi.com](http://www.cloudchi.com).

**"The energy in the body's center is kept as a coiled spring—relaxed yet tenacious."**

At the completion of this "rise and drill," the hand turns over, slides down to the natural handle of the wrist or elbow and pulls at a 45-degree rear angle, unbalancing your partner. This is not a block, grab and yank; the whole action is a continuous smooth movement accomplished by the flywheel turning of the waist. The strength of the legs and torso must be included in this movement. When you can perform the single-hand interception smoothly you can then add the natural movement of the second "attacking" hand. This simultaneous striking of the left arm is also part of the turning of the left hip (like a spoke of a tire), not a separate hand attack. One hand follows the arc of the other, striking the outside targets of



**PARTNER EXERCISE FROM THE OUTSIDE**  
The author intercepts Ed Mendelson's right strike with an outside right hand piercing "Rise and Drill" (1). His "overturn and fall" unbalances Ed to his right-rear while his left hand follows The action and strikes outside targets (2).