

Striking a Perfect Balance

Harmonizing the five building blocks with the three forces lets you take advantage of the energy within and around you

BY BOB ELLAL AND RAMEL RONES

What makes a martial artist? Is it merely fighting well and defending oneself against any attacker? It cannot be that alone; many streetfighters can do this and they do not deserve the title "artists." It is far more than fighting skill; it takes a much greater commitment on many levels to be a true martial artist.

"You must learn to first fine-tune, then balance, all five aspects of your being—body, mind, breathing, energy and spirit—then harmonize them with the three forces of Earth, Heaven and Human," maintains Ramel Rones, mas-



Romel Rones, shown here practicing a sword form, maintains martial arts helps balance all five aspects of a person's being.

ter teacher of northern shaolin, white crane, chin na, weapons, tai chi chuan and chi kung. Rones is a disciple of Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming, celebrated kung-fu master, author and lecturer.

Rones has studied his lessons well in

the more than 20 years he's trained full-time with Dr. Yang and other renowned Eastern arts masters. He's won gold medals in solo form as well as fighting competitions in North America, Europe and even China. He's used his chi kung knowledge to help cancer patients survive, the elderly cope with what he calls "unnecessary aging" and develop and tailor a mind/body approach, based on the principles of various martial arts, for debilitating diseases such as cancer and arthritis.

"Fighting and forms successes are only the external manifestations of the arts, which is needed at a certain step of the path of a martial artist," explains Rones. "After all, the real goal of martial arts is a lifelong journey of self-discovery and self-



Above: Ramel Rones has won gold medals in solo form as well as fighting competitions in North America, Europe and China.

Left: Martial arts is about more than merely becoming the best fighter.

mastery. If you learn martial arts only for the purpose of fighting, you will probably lose interest at some point or another—you will have achieved mastery only over the first building block of our being, the body, but stopped there. As you get older you will naturally be more concerned with health and longevity, and perhaps the goal of enlightenment (or at least intensive sitting or standing meditation) so that's where the other building blocks—mind, breathing, energy and spirit—come into play."

The martial arts journey, notes Rones, is one in which you strike a balance between external and internal work and developing the mind and the body. By doing so, you will not only be on the right path to achieving great fighting powers, but maximum health and longevity, and a better quality of life for you and the people around you.

Fine-Tuning the Body

"You begin to fine-tune the physical body through finding a balance between strength and flexibility. One way to achieve this is by doing forms and drills," says Rones. "Relaxing the body is the first

step in fine-tuning your body. Only when you are relaxed are you able to find balance and find your physical body's center. Once you find your center, you are closer to finding your roots. From finding your roots you are one step from experiencing your energy, which is the right path to achieving a high level of martial skills and a better quality of life."

Therefore, the five building blocks are all interrelated: You use your mind to help relax your body, and you will use your breathing to help focus your mind while tapping into the energy and spirit to boost and upgrade them all.

"For example, proper breathing helps prevent tight muscles or having lactic acid build up in them before you spar or fight," Rones explained. "If you take several deep breaths your mind relaxes and sends signals to your muscles to relax also. They become supple and you are able to better sense your opponent and strike more quickly and with greater power."

Besides finding a balance between strength and flexibility, other concepts and skills needed for fine-tuning the body—for both martial and health purposes—are:

1. Freeing the skeleton from being a prisoner of the soft tissue.
2. Taking the first step toward achieving the art of effortless power or giving your body the feeling of "transparency." We must understand and achieve alignment in our different postures throughout life. These postures include: lying, sitting, standing and moving slowly.

3. Maintaining range of motion by stretching the various soft tissues around joints, such as muscles, fasciae, skin, ligaments and tendons. Then you learn to pump and pulse the ligaments that will boost our energetic system, which will "fill" the body with abundant energy. Using resistance to increase muscle mass, prevents sarcopenia—or the loss of muscle as you age—and increases bone density.

4. Creating "space" and constant movement for the internal organs to function at maximal capacity first by alignment and then by massaging the internal organs through self-massage and movement.

5. Physically aligning the qua—the area from the belly down, which includes the hips and groin.



The martial arts, as seen in this chin na application, is a journey in which the practitioner strikes a balance between the external and internal, while developing the mind and body (1-3).

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6. Creating the “dam” effect for both the blood and energy—learning to tense and relax different muscles. This effect is present in different philosophies, which use techniques to achieve it: in yoga through asanas, holding postures for a long time; and in Chinese arts through repeatedly tensing and relaxing different muscle groups.

7. Embryo breathing—controlling abdominal and the lower back muscles, in and out, as you breathe. Using the mind, you learn to tap into the center of gravity energy center and pituitary gland energy center or what the Chinese refer to as the lower/upper dan tian, or field of elixir. The lower visualization: the area 2



Rones says that fighting and form, demonstrated here with the deer hooks, are only the external manifestations of the arts (1-2).



Fine-Tuning the Mind

Have you ever practiced standing post meditation, which is one of the foundation practices of the internal martial arts as well as some yoga styles? If you have, then you have experienced the difference between your emotional mind or what in the art of chi kung is metaphorically referred to as the *monkey mind* (in Chinese, xin), and what we in the West refer

you not to think throughout the task so you can achieve a meditative mind, with brain waves between awake and asleep to activate a positive hormone production.

Your monkey mind, or our emotions, is the part of you that wants to quit after five minutes because your thigh muscles and shoulders burn from the pain of holding the posture. Thus, the Chinese say you must “seize the monkey and tame the horse” if you want to achieve health and be a successful martial artist. The xin or monkey mind is emotional and excitable

“Five building blocks can help you raise or ‘cool’ your spirit and accomplish incredible things.”

inches beneath your navel, which is your being’s center, and the upper area at the base of the brain where the pituitary gland is located.

8. Understanding the major up and down forces and achieving proper alignments through the head, neck, shoulders, three sections of the spine and sacrum.

9. Bow breathing—the long “bow” of the spine as it moves forward, backward, up and down and the cross “bows” of the shoulders as they arc and expand. This includes bowing, pumping and pulsing.

10. Self-massage, which is achieved by tapping, slapping, brushing and kneading the body, especially around the internal organs.

These fine-tuning exercises will make you more than just a better martial artist; they will increase your health and put you on the road to greater longevity.

to as our *logical* mind, referred to metaphorically in chi kung as the *horse mind* (or in Chinese, yi).

Your horse mind makes the decision to take on the rigors of standing meditation. It “tells” you on a physical level how important it is to your training to squat in a high horse stance and your arms in an arc in front of your chest until you can maintain the posture for more than an hour. Your horse mind tells you that you will be building a strong root, integrating your body as a unit and developing tremendous chi. On a mental level it “tells”

One needs to develop his lungs to achieve good health and become a proficient martial artist (1-2).





You must first use your hands to control or mold the movements of the muscles in your lower back and abdomen (1-3).

and must be put on a leash or tricked to be controlled or seized. The yi horse mind is strong and powerful, but you must also harness or train it to use it effectively. Successfully balancing the mind means having to fine-tune the horse mind, logic, to “capture” the monkey mind, emotions. When the emotional mind is controlling the wisdom mind, you will be calmer and more focused. Different styles use different methods to train this skill through a variety of tricks or mental visualizations. Some typical visualizations are the image of the moon or religious individuals, such as Buddha, or Jesus Christ. You can also repeat a prayer or a mantra. By focusing or visualizing on a person, sound, movement or an object, you can lead your mind into a steady, calm state and use your wisdom, yi, to conquer your emotions, xin. Called *guan xiang*—“observe thinking”—you first need quiet to observe thoughts and achieve control.

Fine-Tuning the Breathing

You need to develop your lungs to achieve good health and be a proficient martial artist. That is accomplished through good cardiovascular training or what in yoga is called *pranayama* or the *science of breath*.

Another reason for having bigger or stronger lungs is to help you “capture” the monkey mind. The lungs are metaphorically compared with a banana that has the potential to capture the monkey; by developing the lungs we will have a bigger “banana.” Quitting the monkey mind leads to greater success on health and martial arts levels.

“However, you also must fine-tune your breathing to stay in focus when you fight,” Ronces notes. “If your breathing is wild and out of control, your mind will race and you will burn up your energy quickly. You must pace your breathing—that is, the banana we use to capture the monkey mind. When your breathing is measured, your thoughts are, too. That is the connection. Then you will stay calm and in control of the situation, whether it is a sparring match, a conflict on the street or a conflict in life—such as a health problem.”

Using your breathing—the banana—to capture the monkey mind is also vital to qigong training, which every martial artist should perform to strengthen his martial arts and health. It allows you to breathe deeply and calmly to relax, which keeps your mind clear and fills your lungs with plenty of air. Also, deep breathing helps the diaphragm move up and down, which stimulates the internal organs and makes them operate more efficiently.

One way to develop the lungs and use your breath to capture the monkey mind is center of gravity energy center breathing or embryo breathing. Embryo breathing is divided into the physical and mental. Physically, when we breathe we make a conscious decision to notice the diaphragm descending while coordinat-

ing each breath with the movement of the abdomen and the lower back muscles. Mentally we “put” our thoughts or mind in our center gravity energy center. Remember, the monkey mind will find ways to distract the mind and pull it away from residing in this energy center or low dan tian.

You must first use your hands to control or mold the movements of the muscles in your lower back and abdomen, since those muscles are seldom used for

specific movements. It’s very possible we haven’t used those muscles since childhood, hence the name for the movement. There are two ways to perform this mind/body prescription. One for relaxation and circulating energy internally: When you inhale, intentionally expand your abdomen and back muscles, full moon; and when you exhale, let them contract, empty moon. That is also considered Buddhist breathing in the art of chi kung.

The second way is to manifest energy or express power from the body. When you inhale, contract the lower back and abdominal muscles (empty moon) as you

exhale expand them (full moon). That is Taoist breathing. In both breathing methods you also are gently coordinating the movements or “pulsing” of the huiyin cavity—the area between the groin and the anus—with the movements of the lower back and abdominal muscles.



Standing post meditation helps you experience the difference between your emotional mind and the monkey mind.

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Fine-Tuning the Energy and Spirit

Your vital energy—that which animates from you and keeps you alive—is known by many different names. The Chinese call it *chi*; the Japanese, *ki*; the Greeks, *pneuma*; the Indians, *prana*; and Native Americans, the *Great Spirit*. To Eastern adepts, studying the energy is actually a science. This force can be cultivated through proper direction of the (body) mind and breathing through arts such as yoga and chi kung. Through proper training of the five building blocks, you can raise or “cool” your spirit and accomplish incredible things.

“We’ve all witnessed martial artists who have seemingly transcended the laws of physics by breaking stacks of bricks or ice with a single blow, or even one single brick within a stack,” Ronés



This group photo was taken at A Taste of China. From left: Master T.K. Shih, master Liang Shou-yu, master Jou Tsung Hwa, master Yang Zhen-Do, master Yang, Jwing-Ming and Ramel Ronés.

relates. “The same great feats can happen within the healing side of the martial arts. I work with cancer patients who have recovered from hopeless cases of Stage 4 disease because their spirit was strong and it enabled them to train hard in qigong and build their energy. Also, I have seen people whose spirit wasn’t



In both Buddhist and Taoist breathing, you gently coordinate the movements or “pulsing” of the *hiuyin* cavity. Here, Ronés demonstrates a white crane application (1-4).

strong who wouldn’t train hard and didn’t survive.

“Having a strong spirit is, metaphorically speaking, like being in a forest. In the daytime, we can see our way clear,”

Ronés adds. “At night, visibility is bad when darkness falls and the mist rises. That is when we need faith and belief to keep us going. Having a strong spirit is like having a compass in this dark, misty forest. Our spirit needs to be trained through philosophies which include energy work so we can raise it to full strength when we need it.”

Five Building Blocks and Three Forces

Once you fine-tune and then find a balance among the five building blocks, you need to

harmonize them and the forces around us. Seekers of the martial arts and health have to live in harmony with the constant changing forces of the universe.

“For example, for both the health and martial arts, first you must fine-tune the body, breath, mind, energy and spirit and then balance among them; to be able to

act while setting in motion each in real situations. That’s harmony of the five building blocks with our force or energy,” Ronés explains.

“Then you must ‘go’ to the next level to tap into the Earth and Heaven energies, which for the martial artist can generate tremendous power and for the health seeker abundant healing energy,” he insists. “You should also tap into the sun as well as the moon energies and use their powers to achieve specific yin and yang goals with your energetic system. That is harmonizing the three forces of Earth, Human and Heaven.

“Through harmonizing the five building blocks with the three forces, you ‘recognize’ how to take advantage of the energy within you and around you,” he states. “That is why the Chinese do not believe in or have the word *luck* in their vocabulary. However, they do include the word *destiny*.” ☯

Ramel Ronés is a senior disciple of renowned teacher and author Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming, in Boston, Massachusetts. Ronés is a gold medalist in external and internal martial arts. Bob Ellal is a freelance writer. For more information about specific exercises to fine-tune the five building blocks with the three forces, visit www.ramelrones.com.