

WORLD'S LEADING MAGAZINE OF SELF-DEFENSE

47432



\$2.50
APRIL 1987 CANADA \$2.95

BLACK BELT

BLACK BELT™

**BRUCE
LEE'S
ART
ALIVE
AND
WELL!**

**Dragon's
Disciples
Spread
Jeet
Kune Do**

**CAN
A NINJA
BREAK
BRICKS?**

**Or is it All
Black Magic?**

**KICKBOXING'S
BATTLIN'
BILL WALLACE**
*The Legend of
"Superfoot"*

**CRUSHING
KARATE KICKS!**
*The Martial
Arts' Most
Powerful
Techniques?*

**FOUR PILLARS
OF KUNG FU**
*Foundation
of All Fighting*

**KOREA'S
SHADOW WARRIORS**
*The Deadly Art
of the Hwarang*

THE JU-JO
*Latest in
Police Weaponry*



KUNG FU'S FOUR

The Foundation of All Fighting Techniques

The ancient martial art of kung fu is known for several things. Number one is agility, especially in the northern Chinese styles. Many of the ancient masters were also accomplished gymnasts, as are today's *wushu* performers from the People's Republic of China. You can also see gymnastics in an extreme form

in Chinese martial arts movies.

The second thing kung fu is noted for is its mimicking of animals in its forms. The basic kung fu animals (snake, tiger, crane, leopard and dragon) have a reputation for being agile. This is most likely where the necessity for agility in kung fu sprang from. In order to be able to ap-

proximate animal movements, it is necessary to be as supple as the animals themselves.

Kung fu is also known for its speed of movement. Many times a kung fu stylist will practice one form eight or ten hours a day for months or even years on end. The purpose of this training is to get the

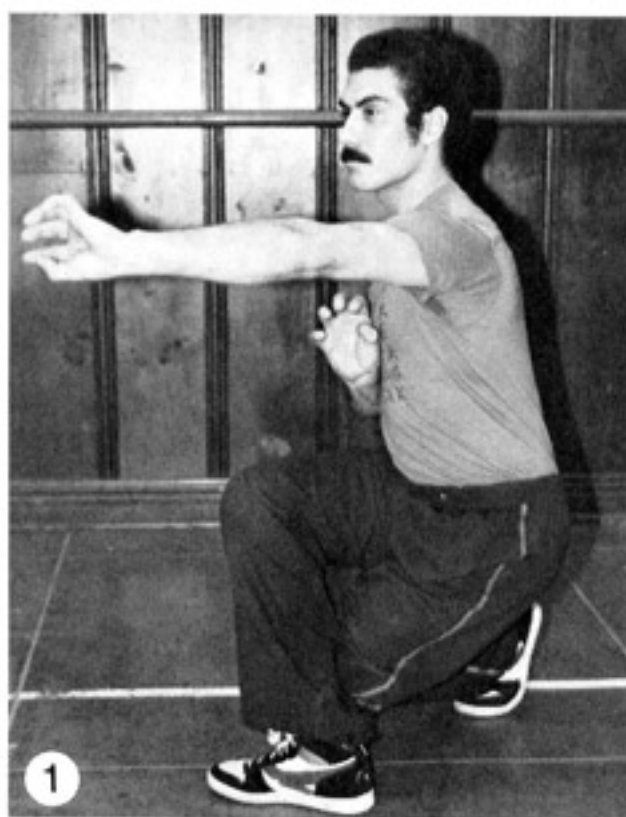


PILLARS OF POWER

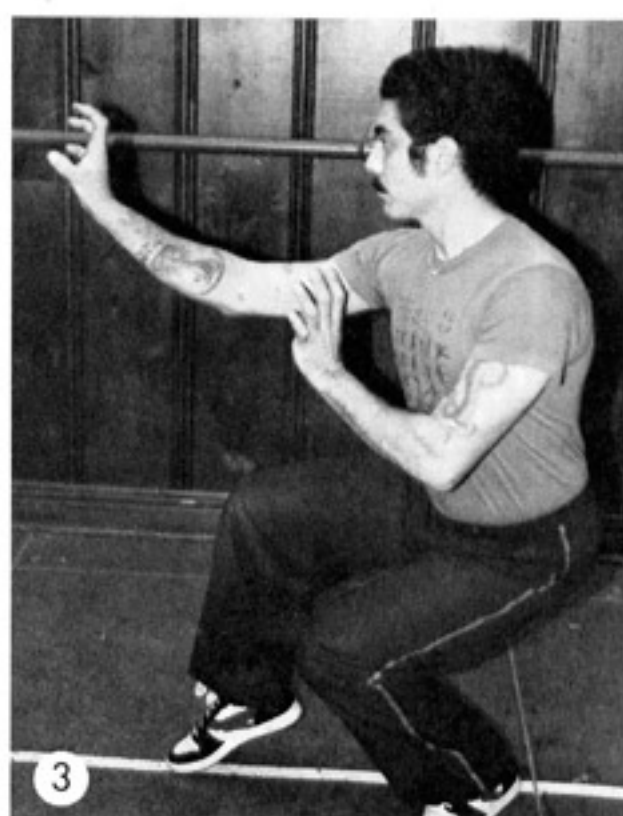
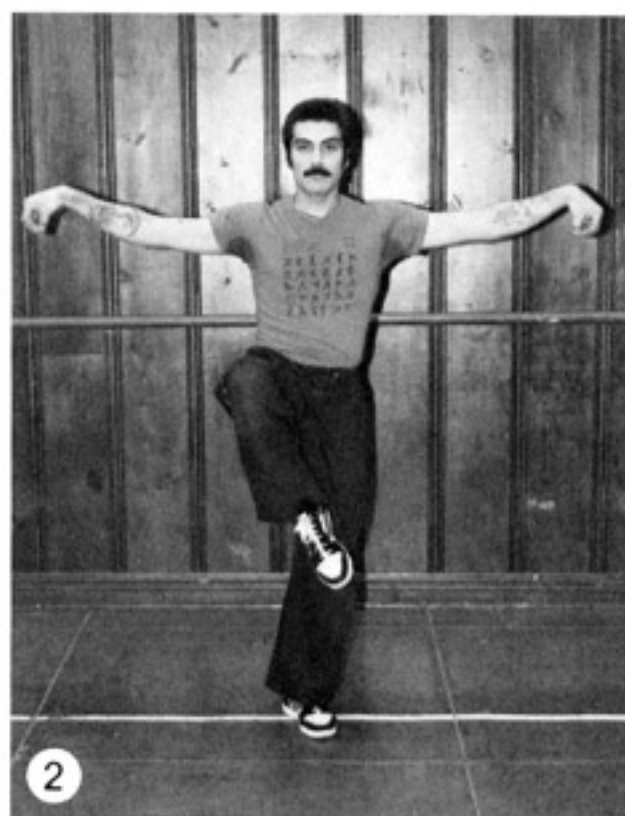
by Alexander S. Holub, Ph.D.

form so perfect that every minute detail can be worked into each movement the faster the individual moves.

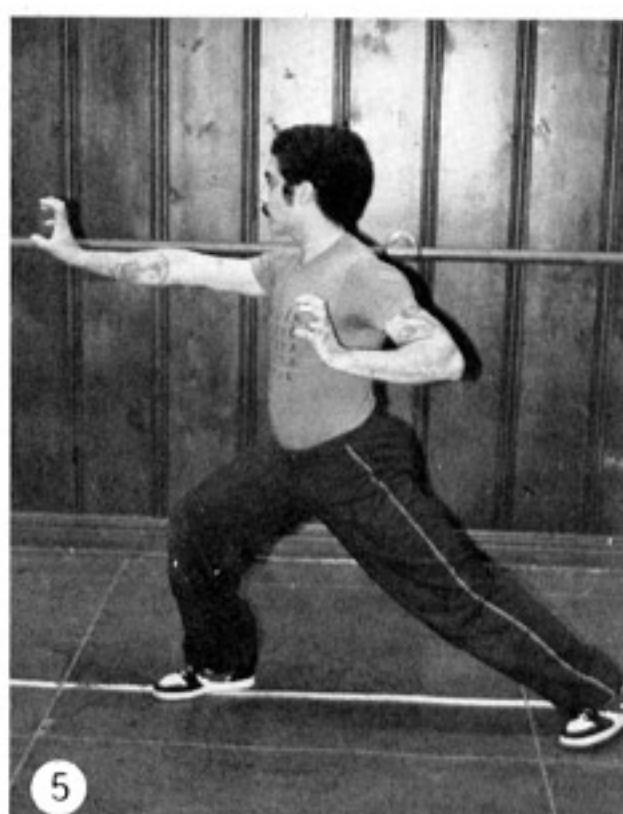
Health benefits are another important component of kung fu. Most people see kung fu as a martial art and fail to see its relationship to the mind, body and health. Used properly, kung fu is an



The five basic animal forms in kung fu are the leopard (1), the crane (2), the tiger (3), the snake (4), and the dragon (5). The necessity for agility in kung fu likely sprang from the development of these animal postures and movements.



Technique photos courtesy of Alex Holub



excellent form of meditation which, like *hatha* yoga, can aid a practitioner in getting in touch with his or her body. As a meditation, it teaches concentration and the narrowing of one's attention. A healthy mind follows a healthy body. What is not known by many practitioners is that each of the five basic animals which kung fu mimicks is designed to strengthen different parts of the body. The snake, for instance, develops *chi* (internal power) flow through its continual movement. The tiger strengthens the bones by developing agility in striking and jumping. The crane develops alertness, balance and coordination. The leopard strengthens the external muscles by developing destructive strikes. And the dragon, known for its ferocity, lightness and swift countermotions, helps develop the mind and exercise the abdominal area.

Finally, kung fu is known for its circular movements. Although there are one or two lesser-known linear styles, the vast majority of kung fu styles are circular in application. Masters of the past noted that infants began to naturally move in circular motions. Consequently, the natural movements of the body are circular as opposed to linear. Furthermore, the greatest distance between two points is an arc, not a straight line. The *shortest* distance may be a straight line, but for overall strength, the arc is superior.

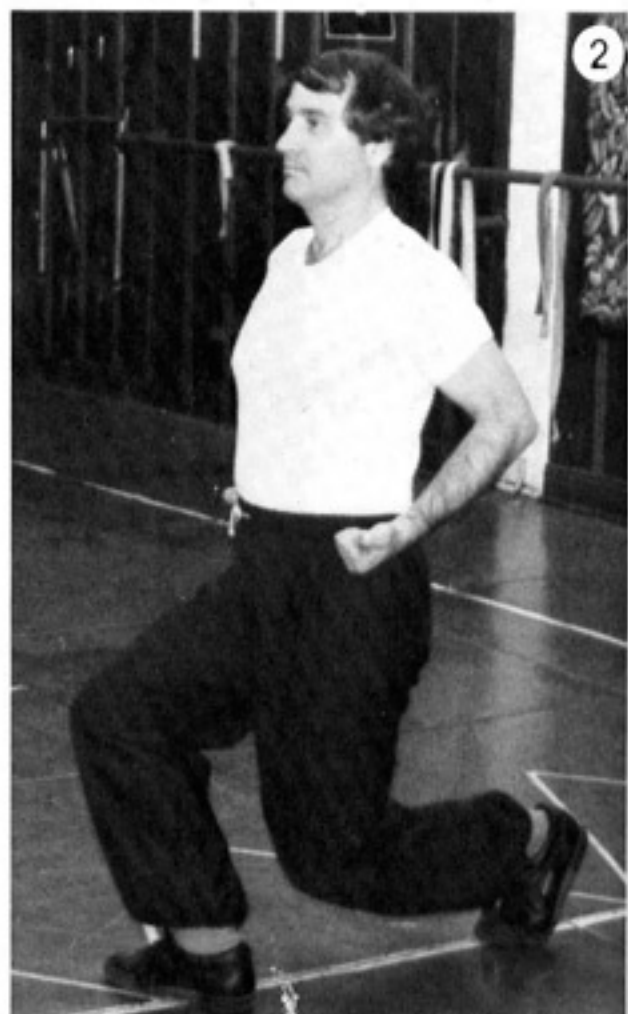
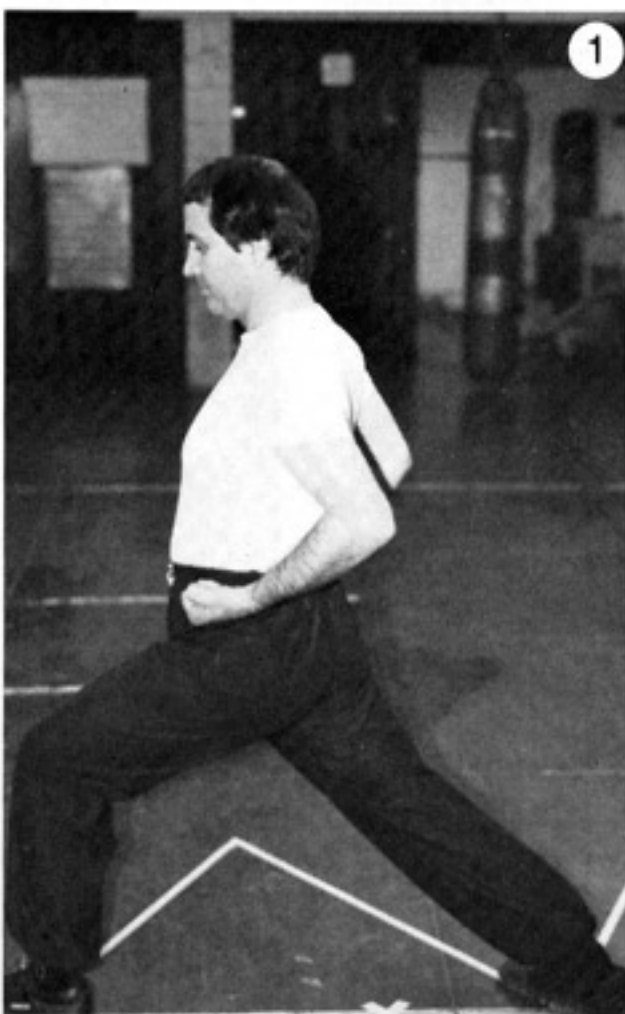
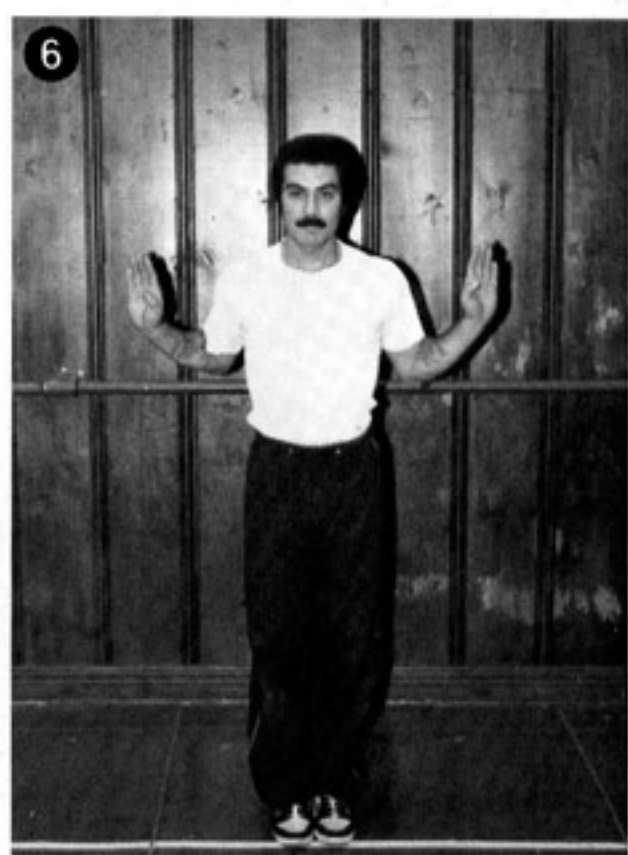
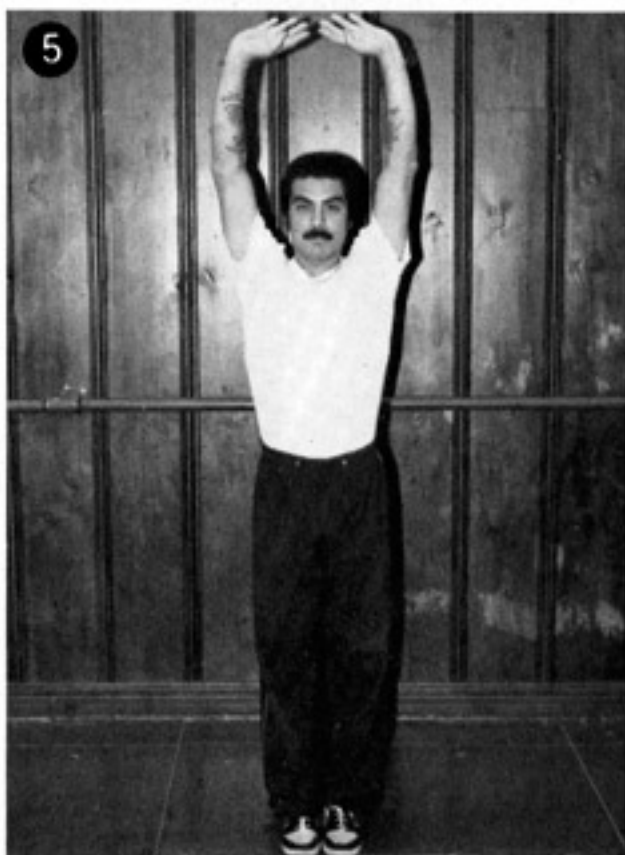
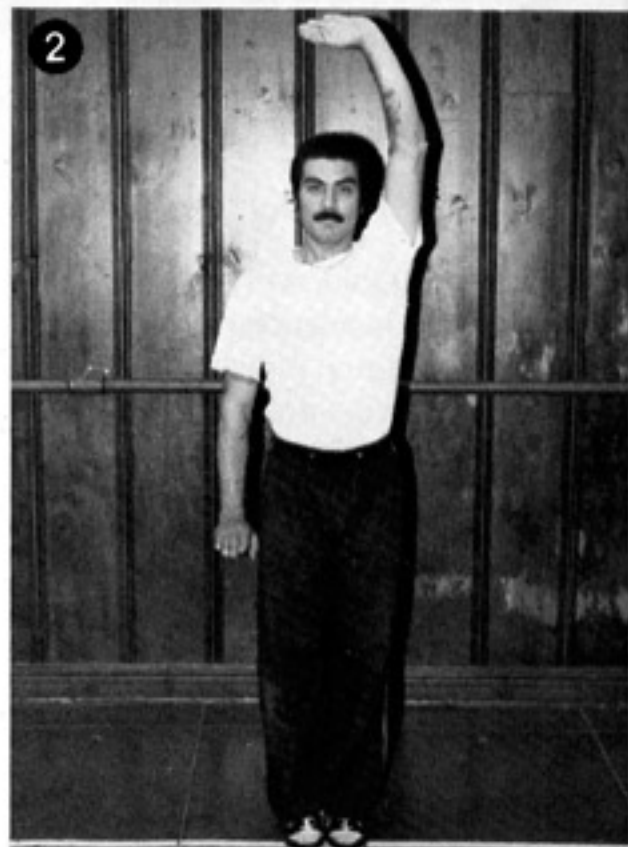
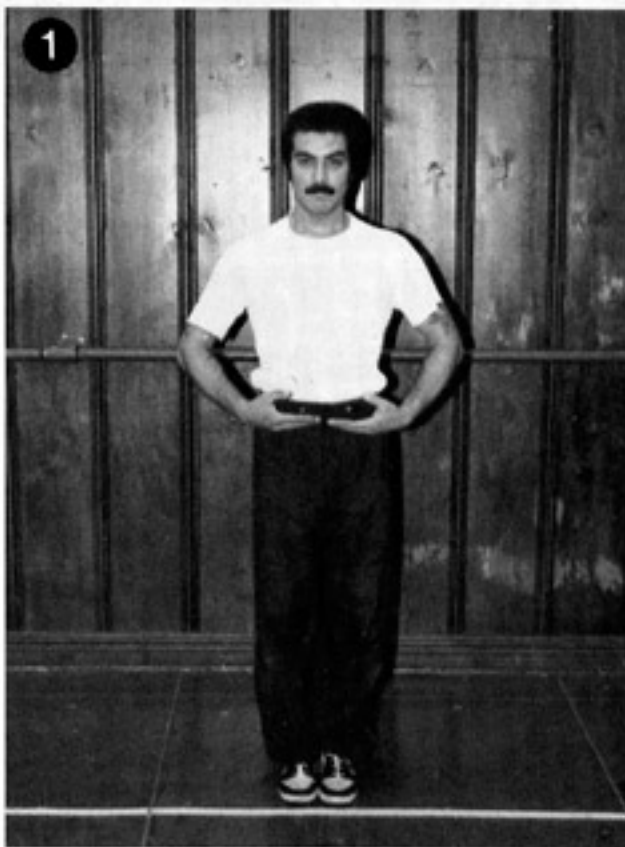
Kung fu has developed a system of power in the more than 2,000 years of its existence. This system follows a logical sequence and particular steps and practices. These steps can be called kung fu's "four pillars of power."

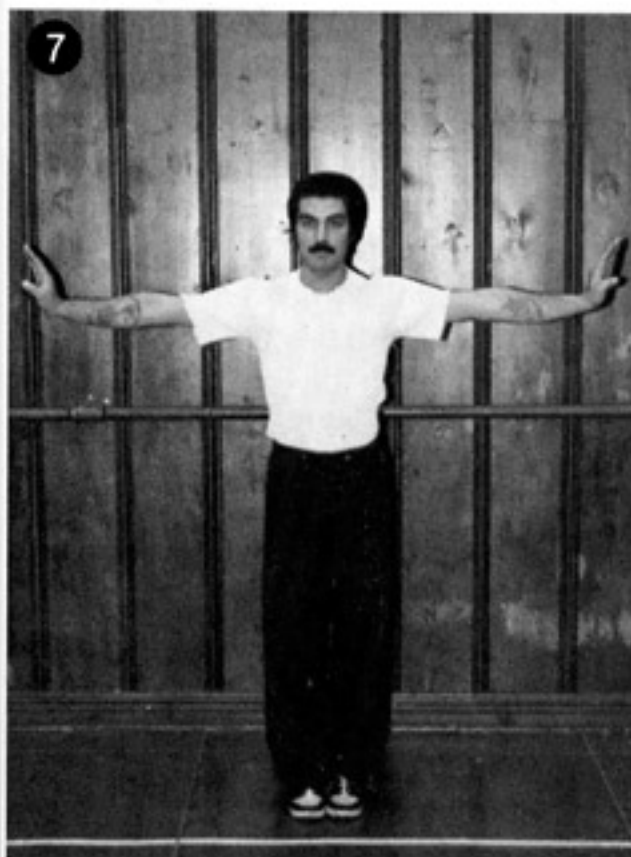
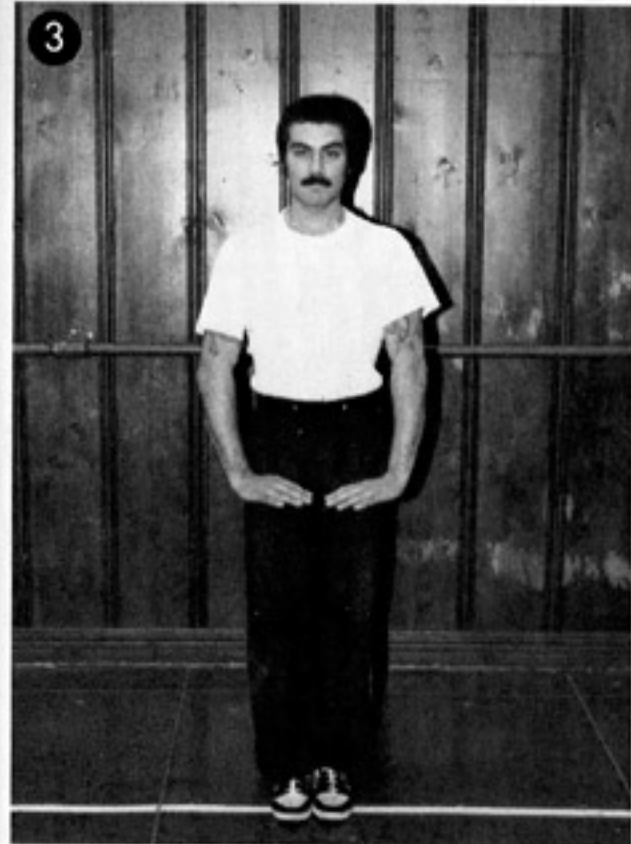
First Pillar: Legs

Kung fu, like a good building, is constructed on a solid foundation: the horse stance. Without proper development of the horse stance, the rest of the movements will not be as solid or as strong as they could be. Essential to the mastery of a solid horse stance is proper balance. One's balance should be in the center of the foot; then each step will be rooted to the ground.

Traditional kung fu training begins to develop the horse stance by simply

Stance training plays a large role in laying the foundation for solid kung fu. Some of the more common stances are the basic horse stance (1), the crossover horse stance (2), the "cat" or back stance (3), and the one-legged stance (4).





Breath training is one of the four pillars of kung fu, and chi kung exercises (1-7) are an excellent way to develop proper breathing in conjunction with hand and foot movements. The idea is to get the chi to flow with the blood, the breath and the will of the practitioner. The breath is expelled with every outward movement, and air is taken in with every inward movement.

standing. For usually no less than six months and for no less than a half hour at a time, the beginner must stand. Not only does this condition the legs, it also promotes patience and concentration. Hence, not only is the body developed, but also the mind and character of the individual.

The strengthening of the foundation through the horse stance is usually

practiced for years by dedicated kung fu stylists, who realize the importance of this simple exercise. But after formal, basic front horse stance training has been set aside, other aspects of horse training are introduced—the walking motions and the other horse stances.

The importance of just standing in the horse posture cannot be overemphasized. Proper daily training will affect everything else one does. In horse walking, for example, each step will be placed properly and at the desired distance so there will be absolute precision, whether in forms, fighting or while going to the store. The standing training also cultivates balance and solidity of movement; both are very important for the flow of each section of the form into the next part. The flow of power begins from the legs and surges up through the body and into the arms and hands.

Second Pillar: Hips

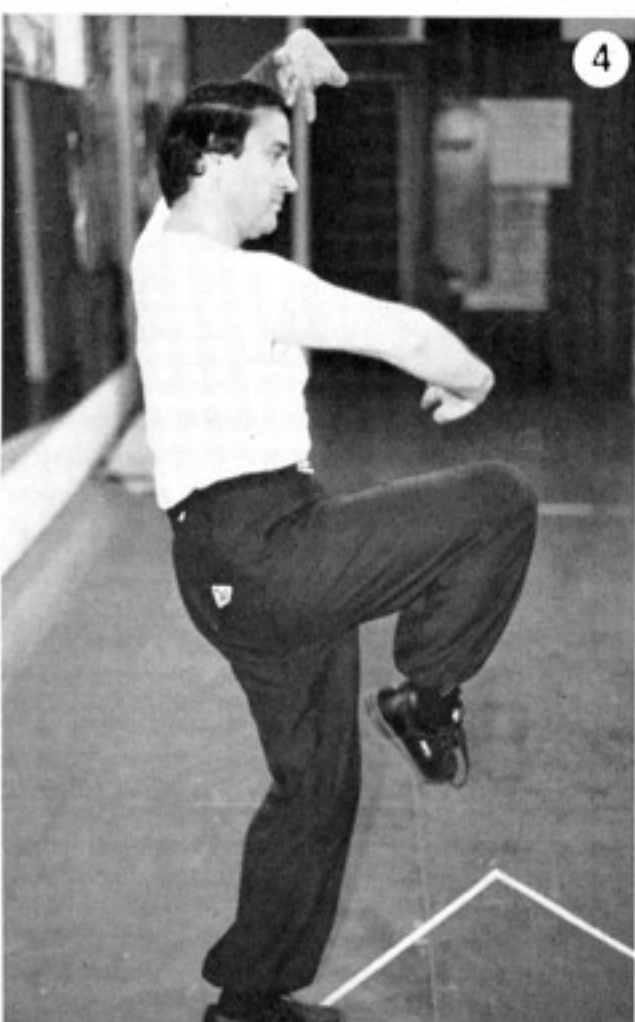
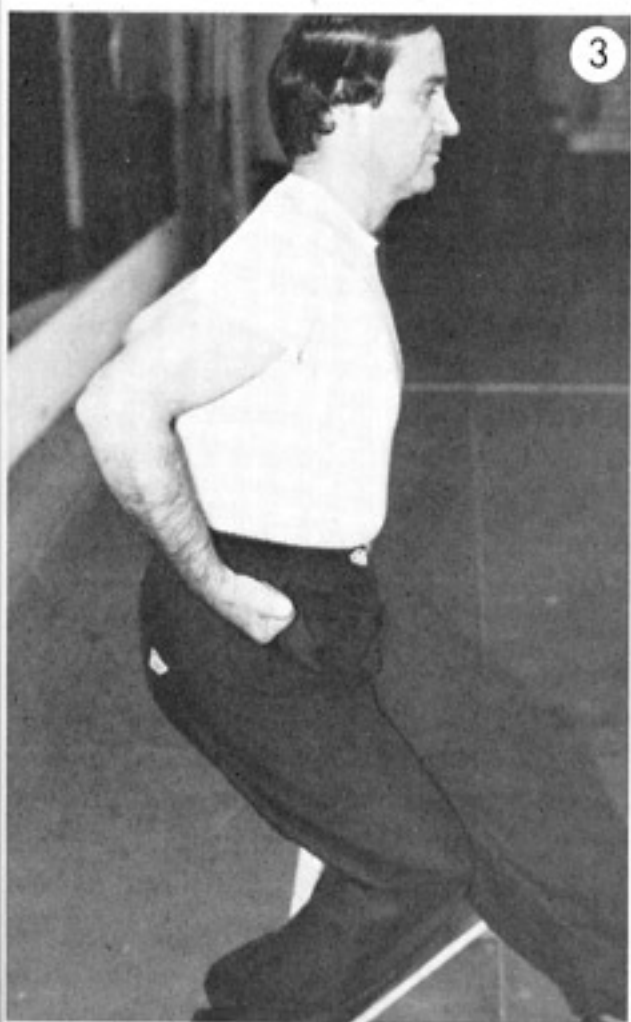
How many people who get involved in kung fu understand or stress the value of hip movement? Its importance in the flow of chi is seen in the internal styles of *tai chi*, *pa kua* and *hsing-i*.

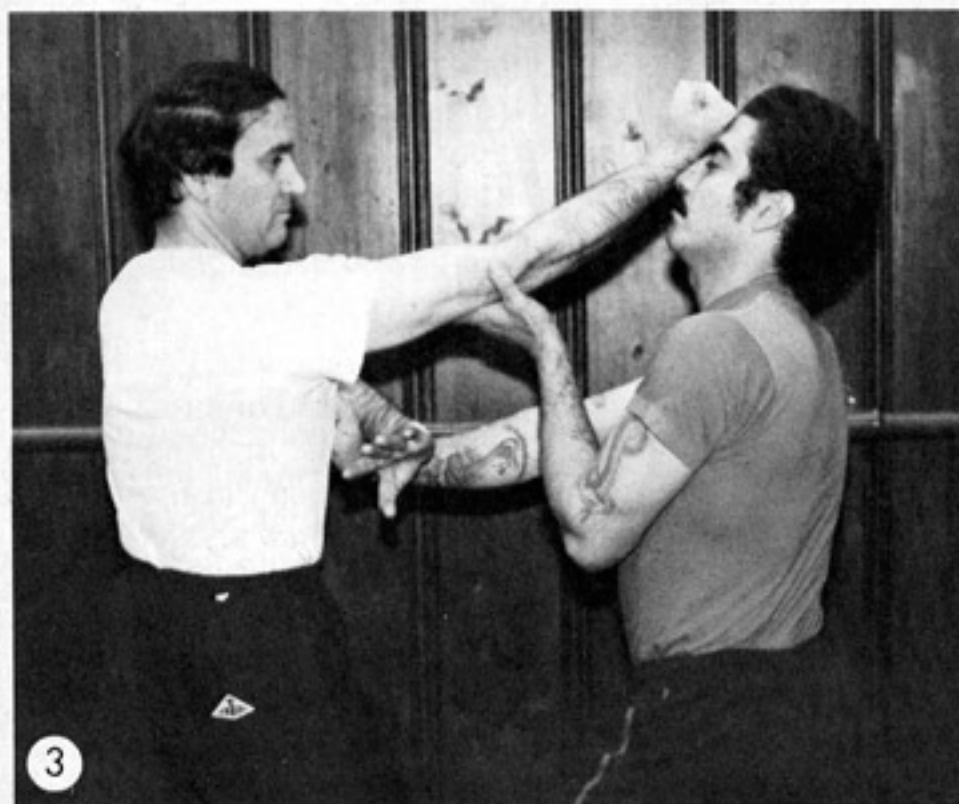
Why should hip movement be strongly expressed? Simply because two crucial items are situated in the hip area. First, the hip area is the seat of balance. With appropriate body balance, movements will flow with ease and there will be harmony between the lower and upper parts of the body. Second, one of the body's main energy inlet points, the *tan tien*, is located in the hip region; consequently, the hip area is the seat of chi power.

What is it that gets chi to flow? None other than the movement of the hips.

Hip movement in this instance refers to the rotation of the hips along a level line and a straight axis. This is achieved with the appropriate balance of the body, a solid movement on the horse stance, and a straight back.

The flow of the hips is important in basic horse stance training. As the novice begins his first motions on the horse, it is necessary that the hips move properly. With correct hip movement, the step will be precise, the horse stance will be solid, and the individual will be stable and balanced. In addition to the individual's movements being precise and balanced, this same harmony of movement will be seen in one's everyday walking. Each step will be measured, each movement will flow from the ground up, and the individual will move in a smooth, level, straight line. As the hips move, the whole body flows in harmonious unison.





One secret to getting chi to flow from the torso through the arm is the "bent elbow" concept. A bent elbow puts the power point at the tip of the hand, rather than locked within the arm. Here, the defender's bent elbow is grabbed (1). With the left hand, the defender pushes down (2) the assailant's hands, bringing his right hand around to release the grip, freeing him to punch (3).

the situation becomes much easier.

Fourth Pillar: Breath

Appropriate breathing techniques are of utmost importance. According to Chinese teachings, chi flows within the body via 1) the blood and circulatory system; and 2) the breath. Since it is somewhat more difficult to control the flow of one's blood, the control of the breath is easier to accomplish.

Basic meditation techniques are essential in all martial arts and should be taught along with the forms and fighting drills. Emphasis should be placed on meditation at least twice a day in order to gain union of mind and body. Many martial artists have probably noticed that those instructors who stress the discipline of meditation have students who are more centered and less hostile. This is necessary in a real-life confrontation.

The reason meditation is mentioned is because of the breathing techniques it teaches. Each breath technique is designed to aid the practitioner in opening up different areas of the self and allowing more of the inner being to flow through. This develops an inner harmony which expresses itself in a feeling of oneness with the outer world.

The next important breathing technique is the *chi kung* exercises. Many instructors teach these as an adjunct to forms and sparring practice. It should be understood that these exercises are also meditations, dealing more with physical movement than the standard, seated type of meditation.

Chi kung is practiced both internally and externally. The external method is done with a tensed body. However, the internal method—the method of the relaxed body—is widely considered best by most chi kung practitioners.

Chi kung combines hand and/or foot movements performed slowly with the breathing. The idea is to get the chi to

Third Pillar: Upper Torso

Many people who become involved in kung fu have the mistaken idea that their punching and hitting power comes solely from the arms. This is a grave error to make, for it leads one into developing the arm muscles to an extreme degree. When one takes a lot of time to develop the arms, the power becomes blocked in the arm and doesn't have the chance to release itself through the hand in a burst of energy.

If the power doesn't extend out of the arm, from where does it come? The answer is quite simple. The muscles in the back and chest are larger and much stronger than those in the arm. Highly developed arms tend to slow down the punches and blocks, although external linear power seems to be there.

Consider the weightlifter. During matches, he employs primarily the muscles of the chest and back. The arms are used to hold, balance and move the weights, but the chest and back do the work. It's the same with the power in kung fu.

How, you may ask, can the chi flow if the chest and back muscles are kept taut, since internal styles are all re-

laxed?

Remember the second pillar of power, that of the hips? This is the source of the chi flow. As the hips move, so also does the chi.

The taut chest and back muscles do mainly two things: they protect the internal organs from damage during a fight, and they bring into play stronger and larger muscles. What, then, occurs is that the external muscles are kept activated while the internal energy flows through a relaxed inner body and out the arm to the point of impact. Consider also the possibility that when the external power is kept at or close to its maximum, the only power available is internal.

One of the secrets for getting chi to flow from the torso into and through the arm is the bent elbow. Certainly one of the best places to block on the arm is any of the joints, which immediately stops the flow of chi. But with a bent elbow, the power point is at the tip of the hand and not locked within the arm. This, then, gives the defender an advantage. Further, by employing a bent elbow, the energy can be easily redirected to another movement and the control of

Continued on page 117

KUNG FU'S FOUR PILLARS OF POWER

Continued from page 64

flow with the blood, the breath, and the will of the practitioner. This, then, is carried over into one's martial art discipline.

In chi kung practice, with every outward movement of the arm or leg, the breath is expelled. Conversely, with every inward movement of the arm or leg, there is an inhalation. A similar action is carried on during the performance of kung fu forms.

While performing forms, it is necessary to get into the appropriate breathing sequence. With every strike (punch or kick), the breath is expelled, and with every block, the breath is inhaled. What is important to remember is that all of the breath is not exhaled during an outward movement. At the beginning of the form, as the first motions of the salute begin, a deep breath starts the action. Just enough air is expelled from the lungs to keep a good flow of movement and good timing of breath and motion. This allows a preservation and release of chi during the action. Furthermore, it allows more self-control and, hence,

better control of the situation.

When the breath is combined with the taut chest and back muscles, the breathing is done solely in the diaphragm, which is the most correct manner. The lower in the abdomen the breath is, the better. Deeper breaths allow for better balance and, consequently, more solid footing with each step. So the four pillars of power become one movement in which the energy flows freely, uninterrupted from the ground, through the body and out the extremity. Combine the four pillars of power with that which holds them together and it produces a free-moving individual.

What holds these four pillars together? The bond which congeals the power into a workable system is none other than the brain.

It is important that individual practitioners also be individual thinkers. All too often we are taught what to think instead of how. Whether in our personal life, our formal education, or our martial arts training, stress is placed on what to think in order to belong. This does not mean that egocentric, uninspired, self-gratifying thoughts and actions are what the martial arts is all about. What it

does mean is that one should consider the consequences before talking or acting. This demands taking responsibility for all that you think, do, and say, for it has an effect on both you and other individuals. Any imposition we force on to another has its consequences. This is why many of the great masters would rather avoid a confrontation than get involved.

Thinking also means you understand that each form is a complete fighting system in and of itself. This is one reason an individual would spend months or even years doing one form over and over again. All you need do is to break each movement down and separate it from the rest and what you have is a fighting technique. For it must be remembered that forms are only a series of techniques which are linked together. Thinking one's way through each form means one will be able to break each form apart and use each part appropriately, combining the horse stance, the hips, the chest and back, and the breath in a rhythmic flow of energy, body and mind.



About the Author: Dr. Alexander S. Holub is a freelance writer and kung fu stylist based in Los Angeles.