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**Wing Chun
Kung Fu
Training
Principles
Any
Martial
Artist
Can
Use**

**by Eric Oram
Photos by Rick Husted**

From the time I was 11 until the time I was 14, I studied karate in Las Vegas. The students at that school were supposed to commit to memory hundreds of techniques that were hypothetical responses to various self-defense situations. It was difficult to remember them all, but I strove to do my best — until I began watching the black belts spar.

What I witnessed as the advanced students fought in the ring looked like nothing I had practiced in the studio. Where were all those techniques I had learned?

When all was said and done, all the black belts had used were the most basic blocks and kicks, along with an occasional punch or two. So why all the techniques, I wondered.

For three years, I struggled with that question. No matter how many times I asked, I never really got an answer that made sense. In the end, I resigned myself to the idea that I was just young and inexperienced and that some day in the distant future the pearls of wisdom would unveil themselves to me. Well, they eventually did — when I began learning *wing chun* kung fu from the legendary William Cheung.

Under Cheung's tutelage, I learned an altogether different approach to fighting, one that is principle oriented rather than technique oriented. I had finally found the answer I had been searching for.

A quick analogy: While I was growing up, my parents did not imagine every single thing that could possibly happen to me over the course of my lifetime and give me a hypothetical solution to those events. Rather, they instilled in me a set of principles to live by and taught me how to

look at the world from that perspective. Thus, as situations arose, I responded to each one based on those principles.

Cheung teaches wing chun the same way. It has a series of principles on which all the movements are based. Each technique is a spontaneous response to a situation. We learn how to identify a situation from this perspective, then let a technique “come out” if it supports the principle that applies to that situation.

In an attempt to save the readers of *Black Belt* from having to endure the frustrations I experienced early in my martial arts training, I will share some of the most important guidelines on which the wing chun system is based. Although the style's principles are numerous, the 10 presented here are particularly useful because they can be applied to virtually any martial art.

KICK NO HIGHER THAN THE WAIST AREA

The primary reason for this principle is the maintenance of your balance. The shorter the time your kicking leg is in the air, the longer it can be on the ground providing you with a balanced stance.

Another reason is target vulnerability. The longer and higher your leg is off the ground, the more vulnerable your groin is. If you kick

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at a low target, your leg returns to the ground more quickly, where it can return to protecting your groin.

Your supporting leg is also more vulnerable to attack when you kick high.

MAINTAIN YOUR BALANCE

Balance is everything. Without it, nothing else really matters. Power in blocking, punching, striking and kicking begins with good balance. Leverage — especially in upright-fighting systems — comes from balance. Without balance, energy cannot be pushed up from your stance and released through a movement or technique.

An effective stance is a mobile stance. Balance should be part of that mobility. If balance is always there, you can freely interrupt your movement at any time and flow into virtually any other movement — and have constant access to the power of the first movement. This freedom is crucial to success in fighting.

Avoid any unnecessary leaning or overextension of your stance because it will slow you down and make you vulnerable to being knocked off-balance.



Eric Oram attacks an opponent with a front kick. Keeping his kick in the waist area of his opponent helps him maintain balance for follow-up defenses.



Grandmaster William Cheung at the ready, protecting his center.

PROTECT YOUR CENTERLINE

The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Use your guard to protect the straight path to your body's center. Own it. Protect it. That is where you live; don't stray too far from home.

By occupying a position along the shortest path between you and your opponent, you force him to take a longer path to reach you. Because distance translates into time, the longer it takes for him to reach you, the longer you have to identify the movement and allow your defensive reflexes to work for you.



Grandmaster William Cheung watches his opponent's lead elbow.

WATCH YOUR OPPONENT'S ELBOW

Quite simply, if a person's arm moves, so does his elbow. Therefore, your opponent's striking arm cannot reach you without its elbow coming with it. The elbow is farther away than the fist and is easier to read because watching it does not strain the eye like watching the closer fist does.

In addition, because it is farther away, the elbow moves more slowly than the fist and is easier to read. In a linear attack, the elbow

moves approximately two and one half times more slowly than the fist. In a circular attack, the elbow moves approximately four times more slowly.

Again, distance translates into time: The longer you can follow the path of the strike — by detecting it sooner — the longer you have to let your reflexes work for you.

The usefulness of this principle is enhanced when you keep in mind that the knee is to the leg as the elbow is to the arm.

FIGHT ON THE BLIND SIDE

In traditional wing chun, the outside of the opponent's lead arm is called his "blind side." This is where you want to position yourself because it allows you to stay the maximum distance away from his opposite arm. That means you have to deal with only one arm at a time.

Again, distance equals time. If you achieve the blind-side position and your opponent tries

to reach you with his rear hand, it takes longer; that gives you more time to react. Also, your opponent may cross his arms as he tries to reach with his opposite hand, and that will leave him susceptible to being trapped.

The objective is to ensure that you have free use of both your arms while you limit your opponent to the use of one. Avoid positioning yourself directly in front of him because you will be threatened by both arms and both legs.



Grandmaster William Cheung demonstrates fighting on the blind side, countering a round punch by using a bil sao and stepping outside of the opponent's arm.

TRAIN TO SEE EVERYTHING

The simplest way to see “everything” is to look at one thing. This may sound like a Zen riddle, but it’s not. If you try to watch literally everything, chances are you will end up seeing nothing.

So where should you look? As stated before, you should start with your opponent’s lead elbow because it is part of his nearest weapon. By focusing on the nearest weapon, you will be able to detect the most immediate threat. Anything other than the most immediate threat will take longer to reach you, thus giving you more time to react.

If your eyes lock on to your opponent’s lead elbow, you should use your peripheral vision to keep aware of three other points: his opposite elbow and both his knees. If you detect one of those body parts moving toward you, your eyes should immediately jump to that part.

If you make contact with one of your opponent’s arms through a blocking or trapping technique, your eyes should jump to the next nearest threat. Because you can feel his threatening limb, you no longer need to look at it. Your eyes are free to look elsewhere.

PUT YOUR OPPONENT ON THE DEFENSIVE

An old saying holds that sometimes the best defense is a good offense. For the most part, that is true: You can’t win by being strictly defensive. One of the best ways to stop an opponent from attacking is to attack him first and put him on the defensive. That will force him to deal with you rather than continue trying to hurt you. He must now defend himself — or suffer the consequences.

Wing chun practitioners strive to block and strike at the same time. That allows them to immediately put the pressure back on their opponent.

ATTACK YOUR OPPONENT’S BALANCE

As stated above, balance is everything. Therefore, you must always maintain your balance and use it to attack your opponent’s balance. Often, that means getting him to lean too far into a technique, overcommit to a movement or overextend his body. Without proper balance, he will not be able to move, block or strike effectively.

In wing chun, that is achieved primarily through controlling the opponent’s elbow. If you control his elbow, you can control his balance.

LEARN TO RECOGNIZE OPENINGS

It is one thing to say, “Put your opponent on the defensive.” It is quite another to know where to hit him, with what weapon and when. Whatever your system, you must know — really know — what your tools are, what range or distance they function in, and what part of the body each is designed to hit.

Furthermore, your eyes must be trained to recognize the opening. If you don’t have “good eyes” and don’t know how to detect an opening, the greatest techniques in the world are not going to help.

Therefore, you must train yourself to be able to detect an opening in any situation and to have the reflexes to take advantage of that opening while it exists.

HAVE “HEART” BUT CONTROL YOUR EMOTIONS

Cardiovascular endurance is crucial to becoming a complete martial artist. However, that is not what is meant by “heart.” In this case, it means fighting spirit or the will to win.

If you don’t believe you can win, you probably can’t. If your opponent is more convinced of victory than you are, he will probably come out

on top. Total confidence, combined with good process and a scientifically sound system, certainly increases the probability of success. But if you do not have heart, even superior skills will never see the light of day; they will be squandered by a more confident opponent.

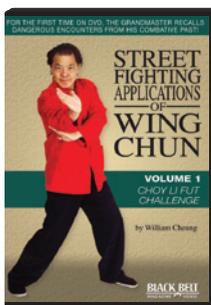
A popular old saying holds that knowledge is power. For martial artists, that is certainly true. You are most afraid of what you don't know. Therefore, the key to eliminating fear is getting to know what you're afraid of. You must strive to become comfortable in uncomfortable situations. You can't allow fear, anger or excitement to interfere with your ability to effectively deal with an opponent.

A wise man once said, "Know thyself."

Only through self-examination can you truly accomplish that. By understanding yourself, you can begin to understand others — including your opponent. And perhaps you will be able to dispose of the fears along the way. That will allow you to focus only on the process of engagement, not the fear of the results.

In conclusion, if you view each combat situation through the perspective of the aforementioned 10 principles — and work to integrate them into your training and sparring — in time you will see a tremendous difference in the application of your techniques. It is guaranteed to work no matter which martial art you practice. ✂

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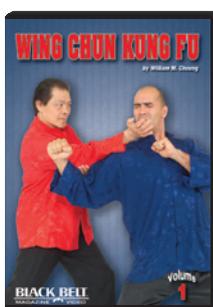
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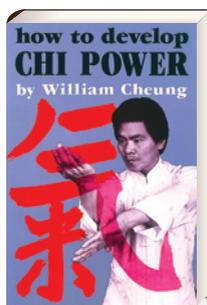
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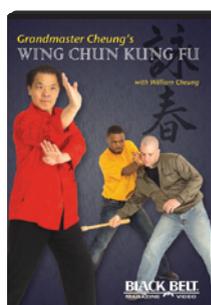
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