

The Footwork of Taijiquan?

(The Non-Technical Series Notes)

Nasser Butt © March 2015

The answer to the above question can be given in one simple sentence:

There is no footwork in Taijiquan or any other martial arts for that matter!

Technically speaking I can end the article here and let you go figure out what it means? It's not rocket science and maybe therein lies the problem!

We humans like to complicate and overthink things. We don't do simple. Maybe that's the price we had to pay for our evolution? Who knows.

Nature understands simple.

Even at its most complex level it actually remains simple. It remains true to its programming and in this simplicity lie the foundations of its power and grace.

Footwork is given a very high place amongst one's martial arts training. After all if you don't know how to stand and balance and how to transmit weight and shift from one point to the next then how are you going to be able to defeat an opponent?

The question is valid and a whole plethora of technical responses have been provided by 'masters' in a language steeped in tradition, mysticism and modern science. Whenever I hear it - I smile at the foolishness of us humans.

Let me ask you some questions:

As a baby who told you keep your head upright?

No one!

As your genetic programming kicked in and your neck muscles started to develop you instinctively realised that they helped you control your head and its movements in various directions.

Who showed you how to sit up as a baby?

Again, no one really! Yes, your mum or dad may have propped you up with pillows but you were too young to understand the mechanics of sitting. Yes? No!

You may have been unable to understand the science of how to sit up but you were listening to your genetic programming, it had not been corrupted yet and as your back muscles developed you instinctively learned to sit up!

Likewise, who showed you how to crawl? Stand? Balance? Squat? Take your first steps? Fall and try again?

Who explained to you the concepts of gravity or Newtons laws of motion? Mechanics of movement? How to run, jump and skip?

No one!

Yet you did it!

Why? As I've already said, it was all a part of your genetic programming. Pure and uncorrupted at the time of your birth and it got you to stand on your feet without you being a science wizard or a 'Grandmaster' in martial arts!

Yet, somewhere along the line we, for some reason, stop listening to our own programming and start to turn into robots... stiff, rigid and no sense of balance!

This is what I see and have seen in over 30 years of training in the martial arts and watching everyday body mechanics - we are simply no longer in tune with our natural programming!

Watch any animal. Take a cheetah for example. Even when it's running at breathtaking speeds it remains balanced, sure-footed, graceful and can turn the tightest corner at a moments notice without losing any momentum whatsoever!

How so?

What martial arts school did the cheetah go to? What fancy book did it read on body mechanics and footwork?

None!

Nature never stops listening to it's inner programming.

Footwork in Taijiquan, and in martial arts in general, is merely an explanation of the fact that if you move correctly from your centre then this is where the feet should end up!

That is all! No more, no less!

The Classics tell us that ***"The centre moves the peripherals"***.

There is nothing mystical here!

Move from your centre and connect the body and everything arrives where it ought to be!

You already knew this as a child!

This is why we practice forms. Whether they be slow, fast, solo or with a partner. Their function is simply to teach us how to reconnect with our natural programming and begin to move fluidly without thought or preconception.

In combat you do not have the luxury nor the time to think what step to take. A real attack can be over in a matter of a second or two. When attacked it is not I who move but, rather, my opponent who causes my movement through their own actions. I simply arrive where I need to be.

You already know how to do this.

You know how to walk down a street.

You know how to change direction.

You know how to move out of the way of something.

You understand distance, timing. If you didn't you'd be run over by a car crossing the road!

We humans have a tendency to get so deep into technicalities and intellectualisation of otherwise simple concepts that we can no longer see the wood for the trees!

So, let me reiterate... there is no footwork. What we call footwork is merely an understanding of how and where the feet end up if we move correctly from our centre. By corrupting and simplifying forms we have taken away the very critical concepts which were meant to keep us in tune with our natural programming and here the modern 'masters' and charlatans who only trained briefly or lazily are to be blamed!

The original old forms of Taijiquan had weighted turns, leaps, sudden changes of direction and balance - without rigidity. Essentially, all the movements you performed as a child on a school playground or a park and just as the child's natural programming was interfered with through modern 'schooling' methods and life, so dubious forms and overthought have undone the modern martial artist!

Now watch the video below... it's not teaching you footwork, but rather how the feet behave if the body moves in a particular manner! I have omitted the hand movements. You don't get it all for free - you must earn it!

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