



## Session Four Four Square Energies

**Taijiquan Core Principles** are descriptions of the essential criteria for practice based on natural laws governing human structure, movement, and function. They are trainable concepts meant to be integrated into any and all *taijiquan* solo and partner practices. Core-principles exercises can be used in form-practice sessions as warmups or they can be trained independently. One's experience of the art is enhanced when one practices according to *taijiquan* core principles.

### 1. 'Energies' or 'forms?'

In discussions on *taijiquan* terms such as 'forms,' 'postures,' 'movements,' and 'energies' are used to describe components of the practice. These are often used synonymously when referring to certain actions or gestures and in many instances this is appropriate. In traditional *taijiquan* theory, four basic 'martial-kinetic energies' (*jin* 勁) are considered to provide a foundation for almost all other elements found within the art. The four *jin* are called 'ward' (*peng*), 'roll' (*lü*), 'squeeze' (*ji*), and 'press' (*an*) and they are usually to be found as movement sequence in *taijiquan* routines.

*Peng*, *lü*, *ji*, and *an* are not merely purposeful gestures, they are expressions of natural principles and are related to the *yin* and *yang* theory at the heart of *taijiquan*. In their *yin* aspect, they are 'energies' that are expressed through the natural operations of structures such as the human body. In their *yang* aspect, they are 'forms' that express natural principles.

#### *The four squares*

*Peng*, *lü*, *ji*, and *an* comprise four of the 'thirteen powers' (*shisanshi* 十三勢), a larger traditional *taijiquan* concept. Together, they are known as the 'four-squares' (*sizheng* 四正) and are famed for their ability to mediate force in a direct manner through clear, solid structures. While it is conventional to describe this quartet of energies as '*peng*, *lü*, *ji*, *an*,' here we will approach them as '*peng*, *an*; *ji*, *lü*.'

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## 2. The Primary Squares: *Peng* and *An*

The word *peng* (棚), or 'ward,' is a special term used specifically in the practice of *taijiquan*. The Chinese character indicates the idea of 'hands offering protection' much in the way an awning protects one from sun, rain, and snow. The *peng* gesture offers this protection without making a particular effort. When the hands are raised in a natural way, *peng* appears. 'An,' or 'press' (*an* 按), is, rather, an effortful gesture that can proceed from *peng*. Whereas, *peng* tends to open and rise, *an* tends to close and sink. *An* pressures downward or forward with a sitting wrist and is there, often translated as 'push.'

The *peng-an* relationship is held together by the tendency of each to express force clearly and directly in what is called 'square energy.' Square energy, by its nature, approaches the structural centre of a thing by resting into *where* and *what* centre is, then supporting or maintaining the connected condition. Of all *taijiquan* energies and gestures, *peng* and *an* are most square in their nature are therefore called the 'primary squares.' The two energies have a symbiotic relationship; when *peng* reaches it's apex, it naturally becomes *an* and, in a similar fashion, *an* becomes *peng* when it reaches the limit of it's expression.

## 3. The Secondary Squares: *Ji* and *Lü*

*Ji* means to 'squeeze' (*ji* 擠) and is created when both *peng* and *an* energies converge into a single force. *Lü* means to 'roll' (*lü* 擻) and has both an outer-rolling aspect and an inner-rolling aspect. Like *ji*, *lü* is a combination of *peng* and *an* energies, but where *ji* expresses itself by advancing and can be used to attack, *lü* expresses itself by retreat and is usually considered defensive.

If either *lü* or *ji* inverts itself, it becomes the other and therefore the two are often paired in *taijiquan* routines. Although they are made from the materials of the square energies, *peng* and *an*, *lü* and *ji* tend to behave in somewhat 'diagonal' ways and they are, therefore, known as the 'the secondary squares.'

## 4. *Peng*, *lü*, *ji*, *an* in *yin-yang* terms

It is possible to apply the *yin-yang* concept to *peng*, *lü*, *ji*, *an* in several ways. Single line 'unigrams' (*yao* 爻) are traditionally used to represent 'yin' (--) and 'yang' (—). Using three-line combinations or 'trigrams' (*gua* 卦), *peng* (☰), *an* (☷), *ji* (☱), and *lü* (☲), can be expressed. Here, it can be seen that *peng* and *an* express a *yin-yang* pair ☰ ☷. This is also true of *ji* and *lü* ☱ ☲.

## 5. The four energies and the stance

The four energies, *peng*, *lü*, *ji* and *an*, occur organically in primary stances that are correctly proportioned. It is important to pay attention to stance type, stance proportion, weighting of stance, and correct movement through the hip-track. When leg work does not follow *taijiquan* core principles guidelines, the four square energies tend to be forced and ineffective.

## 6. *Peng*, *lü*, *ji*, *an* 'proofs'

When core-principle guidelines are followed, *peng*, *lü*, *ji* and *an* emerge and interact with one another spontaneously. This can be demonstrated or proven with the following five examples.

- Raising *peng*. Lowering *an*
- Forward *peng* and *an*
- *An* to *lü*
- *Peng* to *ji*
- *Lü* to *ji*. *Ji* to *lü*