

“Part of your other question was well why do we do forms, and why do we do them alone? Well, again my understanding around the Wing Chun curriculum and the *faat do* of learning it properly is you use the partners and their energy to give you something dynamic and slightly more unpredictable, and less in your control, to show you where your mistakes are, to show you where your edge is, to show you where maybe, you know it’s all fine and dandy when you’re in the form doing something but when someone gives you a bit of energy you lose your balance really quickly or you chase hands or you leave centerline or you get all rigid, and to be aware ‘oh my god, I get rigid. Geez, where in the form could I go and practice without someone throwing punches at me to relax? Oh, I could do that in first section Siu Nim Tau.’ So then after you’ve done a partner drill and you’ve learned where your edges are, you go back to the form and you practice it, say ‘ok I’m going to do Siu Nim Tau this time and really focusing on my relaxation. I’m going to let go of everything else and just play this for relaxation so that the next time I go and do this drill with my partner I’m going to be better in my terms of my relaxation.’ And then so you go and you see that partner again or another one and they reflect something else to you that maybe ‘oh geez my timing is off or my sensitivity is a little wonky or geez I keep missing centerline. Or I keep coming out of my horse, I keep bobbing up and down,’ and then you say ‘oh ok so now when I go home or practice Siu Nim Tau, now I’m going to focus on just locking the horse and not moving a millimeter out of it and being mindful on that.’ And then that will improve. And then I go back in the drill again. And so this is the ongoing loop of your teaching is you’re always going into your partners to find out where your edge is, and then you come back to your forms to polish it because in the forms you are in control of the timing and the speed to keep it at a level where you can actually be paying attention to what it is you want to improve.”

“So it’s kind of like a dialogue you would say between...”

“Yeah. I go back and find out what needs to be fixed and then I go in my laboratory on terms that I can actually improve the thing and then I come back and test it out in the field again, notice where the new learning is—and there’s always going to be new learning, right like every time you get better, you keep realizing how much you don’t really know. In some ways as you get better, your awareness is like ‘oh my god I know less and less.’ So there’s this paradox of thinking you don’t know, like you’re actually getting worse, because you’re understanding how much there is to know whereas in the beginning you’re sort of ignorant, you don’t really know.”

“So it also seems like you’re saying you’re not—in with what you were saying earlier—you’re not trying to internalize the form in a strict literal sense, you’re trying to sort of adapt it and question the form almost. There’s sort of, it seems like there’s a value of curiosity or inquisitiveness, like you’re asking the form some questions that come from your partner work and the dialogue kind of continues back and forth.”

“Absolutely. So it’s sort of a feedback loop, right. And because the way the curriculum is set up, when you’re doing your first form, your exercises more or less correspond to the limits of the form. So most people aren’t shifting or stepping a lot, or doing a lot of dynamic movement, as a beginner, you’re just in your static horse doing basic hand drills because that supports the stance that you’re learning in Siu Nim Tau. Now, obviously, sometimes we play outside the lines but most of the training should be in the static drill. Or not adding hand drills if I’m just teaching you how to step: that’s too much. So every time we go

from one sash level to the next then we basically learn a new form which takes all the things we learned in the previous form and then we want it to integrate even more. So I won't spend too much time talking about Chum Kiu—we can do that for another conversation—but when you learn the next form Chum Kiu I want to internalize a really good horse stance that I learned in Siu Nim Tau, I want to take my centerline, my straight-line, all of those things, I want to bring them with me: as I start to step, shift, change my horse, change centerline, move, kick, all of these things that are basically about balance—which is what Chum Kiu is about—how do I do all of these things straight-line, centerline, timing, sensitivity, etc. etc. but now with my horse moving. With me shifting, with me changing centerline, with me on one leg. More challenging, ok, so now we've upped the game. So again coming back to your question around what's the purpose of the forms: well, you'll do the same thing in Chum Kiu later on when you're doing more advanced exercises, like where do I go back in Chum Kiu to practice, oh, hands and feet moving together, because I sort of need that when I'm doing chi sau, or I'm doing stepping drills now. You don't need hand and feet coordination [4:50/30:00] when you're in a static horse stance just doing a blocking punch drill, and it's just your arms, right. So this is the thing: so the more forms you have, the more you can always go back to 'ok which form is really going to help me with this particular edge I'm noticing in my chi sau, or my *My San Jong* drills, or my whatever it is, that includes a partner.'"

"One of the things I was wondering is—you're talking about in a sort of ordered, scaffolded kind of sense—why then would somebody who is a blue sash or a black sash keep playing Siu Nim Tau; what do they get out of it that's different from the white sash who's beginning to learn those principles, those basic movements?"

"They would just be taking it to more deeper levels. So a deeper level of chi gung, a deeper level of relaxation, a more laser-beam razor-thin fist on centerline that's just a millimeter better than someone else. We just shave the advantages. But they don't feel small anymore because our sensitivity has expanded so much that really small things now feel really big. Whereas when you first start, you're sort of numb, you need a big signal to get 'oh something's happening here.' But when you develop sensitivity, you're like 'oh yeah, I feel his balance going just a little bit, I can feel you rocking on your heels like half an inch, there's my hole.'

"Because when we translate this into a fight—because this is a martial art, it's not just an art, it's for many or most people, they want to have some self-defense skills—these are the advantages that I'm going to have against someone who isn't trained to the same level. Someone might be bigger than me, physically stronger, but I'm going to have all these advantages of sensitivity, timing, more explosive power, better structure of the body, using all of the advantages of straight-line and centerline and hand replacement, and supporting ideas, and all of those things that make the Wing Chun system magical. These are the things that I'm going to train because I actually can do something about them. Like if I'm 5-foot tall, I'm not going to be 6-foot tall; you know even if I go to the gym and work out, maybe I'll put on some pounds but you know again the nature of the art isn't to get bulky and tight, become a body-builder, it's very different than the nature of our system. We want to be relaxed and have a strong core. So it's sort of like Pilates: we want to work the strong internal muscles. But on the outside, I don't want to be so armoured that I can't feel anything or so armoured that my restriction of movement is so tight. So we don't play for those things. The nature of Wing Chun is to not be armoured so I can take a beating. There's nothing wrong with that, that's just not our fight philosophy. Our fight philosophy is use the structure to not get hit and hit and then get it over with. Now whether you think that's realistic or

not, we can argue about that until the cows come home; I'm just saying that's what the philosophy is, so that's where the training and the curriculum supports that.

"And, on a more practical level, sometimes you don't have a training partner. So what are you going to do? Train your forms! Train your forms. You don't have a partner or you're traveling and you can't go to the club, or you move and there's no school—you can still play with your forms.

"I talked about the sort of coded information that's in all of the forms, and it's hard to talk about that without a visual demonstration, but some of the movements—and you're familiar with this—are very artificial, and they're not so much oriented towards a martial application but as a kinaesthetic mnemonic to help me remember something intellectually. But I don't say words, I use the movement to remind me 'oh yeah, that's why.' So, for example, in the *Yat Chi Chung Choi*—the punching from the heart—we fully extend that punch from the centerline, fully extended so the punch is parallel to the floor. I don't know if you know why, in that move, we punch parallel to the floor instead maybe punch head-high or sash level high. Do you know? Do you remember?"

"I would assume straight-line, centerline."

"Well, *this* is straight-line to your head, right? So why do I want to go crest-level, which for me, if I'm looking in the mirror, my arm is parallel to the floor."

"I would think it would have to do with the three principles; it would be about [9:50/35:00] that's the closest point on somebody standing where you would hit them, there, before you could hit them in the head."

"Yes, that's the quickest way to get contact with somebody. But if I don't tell you that—but now you know, so the next time you do that it's like 'oh a reminder,' in a fight, this is where I want to aim: if the centerline is wide-open, don't go head-hunting. Now you can—it's your Wing Chun—but I'm just saying, in terms of pure theory, in terms of the things you have to remember, if you go head-hunting, there's a small risk that if someone else is throwing a shot, and that person is throwing a shot down centerline, and they're going at your chest, and all other things are being equal, speed, power, you're the one who's going to get hit. So these are the small advantages that we have to remember that are available to us. In every form there's several of those embedded in the movements. And if you don't know that or if you just watch a form on YouTube or something, and no one tells you about this, you're missing again the understanding of the training, again the *faat do*. So that's where you need a teacher, and a good club, and people who have this wisdom passed on to them through their teachers. Or else you miss it.

"Make the same case around yoga, I mean yoga's like McYoga now. Most people think of it as a physical practice, and they miss the real teachings behind the yogic practices. And I'm not a yogi or anything, but there's a couple of things I do know, is that the physical asanas in yoga were meant to move the body through a sequence of things so that it would help them calm the mind so that they could go sit on their meditation cushion. But people are all like 'oh I want to get the flexibility, or the strength,' but that wasn't why they did that. It's a benefit they got out of it. The purpose was they intuitively knew if you want someone's monkey-mind to quiet down, move the body strenuously for a while with mindful

breathing, and then the mind slows down and shuts up, then you can now ease-fully transition into a seated meditation. But if people don't tell you that, then you just go and do your class and you're looking all good in your Lululemons and you're getting great benefits but you're missing the deeper point. And so that's the same thing in many of the forms."

"Now, in our culture, we write things down, it's a written curriculum—they didn't do that back then. Or even if they did, they wrote it in idioms. In this sort of poetic metaphorical non-linear language that it can have many different meanings, and so the idioms get you to engage in them and think about it instead of spoon-feeding it to you. They make you wrestle with it. They make you try and find it for yourself."

"It seems to relate to what you were saying earlier that you have to go through that struggle, you have to make it something that you embody yourself because we're all different bodies, we all have different understandings. So it *couldn't* be spoon-fed."

"No, I mean you can show up and believe that and not be awake and many students want that, they're like 'oh you're the teacher, tell me what to do', and in the beginning, yeah, I have to show you the movements, but once you have the movements or the structure or the understanding, then you've got to go a little bit deeper. And then say 'why am I doing this, this doesn't make sense' and you have to ask, and but yes there is a reason, and it's your job, is to try and figure it out. And you trying to figure it out is what builds those neural pathways of deeper integration and understanding. If I keep spoon-feeding you, I'm going to create a lazy mind. And then if I die, or disappear, you're going to be lost. Because I didn't teach you how to learn. My job isn't to keep you dependent on me, my job is to free you of me. I hope you still hang around, but then you don't need me for those reasons. You may need me for other reasons, but not for those reasons. By the time you've learned, you know your four or five years, and you've gone through the whole curriculum, you should be able in theory to teach yourself, to figure things out. All you need is a couple of training partners and explore and you will find the answer if you are persistent. So again this talks to the bigger purpose of, not just this form, but the whole martial arts practice and traditional martial arts especially, is this development of the whole human being. I'm teaching you to grow up, I'm teaching you to be engaged in your own life, I'm teaching you to learn how to feed other people instead of just be fed. I'm teaching you to be empowered and engaged, that you are your own master, if you will just allow yourself to wrestle with these experiences and come to it on your own."