

“So what would you say, to touch on that, what does Siu Nim Tau teach you? – I mean that’s a very big question, but beyond kung fu.” [0:12/40:00]

“I mean, a million things. A million things, I could just ask you, but so on a very basic level, it teaches me to relax. It teaches me to breathe. It teaches me to be mindful. It teaches me that ‘oh my god my monkey-mind is going off all of the time because I can’t distract myself too much by going slow and breathing and then this little chattering monkey-mind is there’—so it reveals to me some truths about myself. When I go slow and I go in it reveals to me maybe all of the things I’ve numbed out or I don’t want to deal with in my life that’s held in muscle tension but also has corresponding emotions, in traumas, in stories, and hurts, and all of that stuff that I just like pile on top of because I don’t want to open up that Pandora’s Box. The martial arts discipline can help you in a scaffolded, safe, titrated way to start to actually unpackage all of that stuff, transform and heal it, and be free of it. The late Grandmaster Moy Yat, and I’m paraphrasing here, said that the whole purpose of your kung fu is to free yourself. Not to be bonded or in bondage to the practice or the form but it actually frees you from fear, it frees you from doing old repetitive behaviours unconsciously, it allows you to have free choice, more and more of it in the moment. Because I’m learning how to go in and to repattern and to re-explore all of the things maybe I’ve learned as a young child to survive or get through life that don’t serve me anymore as an adult but they’re still unconscious habits.”

“In the letter, you make reference to that saying that Wing Chun will teach you—the lessons you get in Wing Chun, if somebody says ‘maintain center, watch your structure,’ that there’s probably a bigger lesson there.”

“Totally, so within, so without. Whatever your learning edges are in a drill, in a form, trust me, it’s happening in some other realm of your life. So, for example, if you’re doing a basic hand drill with somebody and your timing is off and you’re missing it, it’s because you’re not sensitive enough, you’re not listening, you’re not paying attention. Well, where else might that be showing up in your life? Right, where you’re missing things, or you’re not getting the message, or all of a sudden something really bad happens to you, it just sort of falls out of the sky, but actually there have been many, many subtle warning signs for weeks, months, and years, but you just don’t know how to listen to them. Or you don’t want to listen to them, and then, of course, it’s going to be a big traumatic or a big intense event that’s going to wake you up.

“So, relationally, in the letter that you referenced earlier, because this isn’t a solo practice like yourself on a yoga mat, because you are working with another human being, you’re facing them directly and you’re engaging their energy and having to relate with them, this is going to bring up all your relationship issues. All of them. Because some partners, you’re going to love working with, and others, you’re going to hate, and then the question is: what are you going to do with the people you don’t like working with? Are you going to create some sort of story about them, they’re an idiot or they’re blah blah blah, and then you’re going to shun them out, well that’s a good lesson on how you deal with people who have differences than you, that’s what you’re going to do outside in life if you’re doing it in the class. You have an opportunity to use all the Wing Chun theories, principles, and attributes to transcend old relational patterns by sticking in it in a safe way with good guidance and with a guidance of how to actually go through it, which is stay rooted in your own truth, but be open to contact with somebody with healthy boundaries; don’t leave the conversation, unless this is coming for your head,

even if it's not pleasant. Come here instead of putting it over there. So there's all kinds of philosophical things that come up relationally by the practice of dealing with someone else's energy and theirs dealing with yours."

"Don't throw yourself away, keep yourself grounded and rooted."

"Yeah, don't reach out on a limb, stay in your horse. Don't disengage, stay in contact, but with healthy boundaries and space. So there's so many ways that you can play with the philosophy outside of martial realms. If you're interested. And, after a while, if you've been training for a while, and you're following the lifestyle, you're not likely going to get into a fight. So then why are you training? Why are you spending all of this money, why are you devoting all of this time? Well, obviously, you're getting something more out of the art than just the possibility that you might defend yourself or someone you care about someday.

"And so for me I get this personal transformation, I get all these personal sort of things, like relaxation and confidence, and da-da-da-da, but I get amazing relationships. I get great bonds, and a lot of support, I get to support other people, I get to help them, [5:12/45:00] so there's this giving back. There's healing that can happen for people. I mean, there's problem-solving maps, just even on those who want to keep it on an intellectual level, it's like ok well what's your centerline in life? If you're trying to make a decision about something, what's the big picture here? Why are you on this planet? What's your centerline? If you haven't even thought about that, well this system will help you do that. How do you get there in straight-line? Without wasting time, or distracting or, what's the quickest path—you may not be able to take the quickest path, but you should at least know, from where you're standing, where the quickest path is, and you start moving and, if there's an obstacle, ok well how do you change it and take, and you know you just keep going.

"But how do you also do it, as my Sifu would say, with timing and sensitivity? Because maybe in a conversation, the centerline is the truth, straight-line is I'm just going to deliver it, but there's another human being on the end of it, so can I pick the right time for them to maybe hear the conversation and can I use some sensitivity in my language that I can still be clear but not aggressive. So it's not just straight-line, centerline; it's with balance, timing, sensitivity, coordination, orientation—not sort of doing it out of the side of my mouth passive-aggressively, like I'm showing up fully to deliver the message. So there's lots of ways that you can take these principles and theories and apply them. If you want. If you want.

"But what I've noticed is that when you internalize the physical aspects of the art, it's almost impossible for the other stuff not to get integrated. Like you'll notice you're just not going to have time for a lot of bullshit. Because you're so used to like, and people who are all over the place and scattered and talking you know about everything else but the real issue, it's just, you're going to cut those people out. And just realize: I don't want to waste my time. In these kinds of connections or relationships. When I have choice.

"So back to your question about what does Siu Nim Tau give you, it's like well a better question might be what doesn't it give you?"

“Also sometimes the <fights?> together is interesting because, talking about that interpersonal form of development and disclosure that happens, the dialogue of going back to a form like Siu Nim Tau is that you’re then back on your own and you’re able to sort of spend time working through some of that on your own before you go back into a relationship.”

“Which is a really healthy rhythm about you know taking space from a relationship to get perspective and maybe not feel so under pressure. Maybe noticing your own blind spots, your own rolling <?>, and then come back and try it a little bit better, and try and have a co-created relationship. So you’ll notice that in most of our drills—and this next phrase comes from my Sifu—he talks about “investing in loss.” So what that means is your partner is being generous to you, allowing you to get the block or the strike successfully, so you can experience success. Now, in how many conversations or debates or arguments do people basically say ‘ok I’m just going to let you play this argument out and let’s see if what you’re saying is true and bring it all out.’ What if we did that more often in our conversations? If we listen with sensitivity? And the good thing here is—as I talk about it things just come—when I have healthy boundaries and I know I’m safe, I can stay in the conversation. If I don’t feel safe or I don’t have any boundaries, it’s hard for me to invest in loss with you in a conversation. I’m going to go into fight, flight, or freeze. So there’s no healing or transformation in those stress-responses. So again the Wing Chun system embodies healthy boundaries, but maintaining contact. Maintaining contact is the metaphor, the analogy of staying in relationship with somebody, but not to the point where they’re going to be able to hurt you.”

“It’s interesting too because you seem to pointing to, which is something I hadn’t thought of, but when you’re in *jip sau*, that there are lessons to be had from investing in loss too. I mean obviously there’s stuff to be learned in *jip sau*, but that part of that lesson is how to let the other person speak or how to let them engage and how to be not always trying to force your way through or something like that.”

“And by you feeling their success, vicariously or through osmosis, your nervous system also learns and feels it. You can do this obviously through physical contact, but you can do this through watching. **[10:12/50:00]** I can say directly I haven’t touched hands with my Sigung, Sunny Tang, many times—maybe a dozen times in my life—but I’ve watched him, and I can feel the spirit of how he moves in my movements. Because when I watch him, my *yi*, my intention, goes into feeling like not just ‘oh he’s doing that,’ but like I imagine this guy’s got some energy behind this movement and it’s got a flavour to it and it’s got a character to it, and I can feel that. Just by watching. And then my nervous system, after enough scaffolded skill development, can actually bring that spirit. So just by watching you can feed the spirit. You can teach. By touch though, even more. Just by feeling someone else’s success in the *jip sau*, investing in loss position, in your partner role, there’s lots to learn. And when your partner, and this is the long view—so again this really speaks to the Wing Chun traditional Chinese martial art—is you’re investing in a learning process that will take some time, and so that’s the invest part. As opposed to: how can I get the quickest return on my money in three months. I’m going to give so my partner gets better. When my partner gets better, they can then help me up. And then they’ll do it for me. And this is how we get better together over the long run. Instead of I just take take take take take, then I disappear. So again this links to the whole family and relational element embedded in the art but again that’s probably another article. Or another conversation. But everything’s interconnected obviously.”

“We could maybe touch on that a bit if we want to because Siu Nim Tau and the forms start with a bow. We’re bowing forward so I don’t know if you wanted to speak a bit about your understanding of the bow. I was noticing something, and this might be perhaps reading too much into from a white sash perspective, but when you start the form, your feet are together, your hands are together, you’re standing upright, and you come out, you bow, and then you come apart, and you work each side. But the bow is sort of what initiates the whole, that opens it up.”

“So there’s still an act of reverence that sets the tone of what you’re doing. Now most people, and I would say that probably for myself too for the first several years, I never really fully appreciated it, I just sort of went through the motions. But the longer I train and the more I realize the investment and the time and everything that’s put in and everything my Sifu did and my kung fu brothers and sisters, and as I grow up and mature I mean that sinks in. And then now when I think of, wow, look at all of the time, energy, and effort that Ip Man, Moy Yat, Sunny Tang, my Sifu Walter had to put in, had to commit, had to sacrifice, had to watch ten times as many students leave if not more than those who stay, and go through that heartbreak and the disappointment, and still keep giving to everybody as if they’re going to stay, to get the ones who stay. That is absolutely deserving a bow at the very least when we step on the floor in reverence of what we’re actually doing. This is no small thing. This is not a micro-skill, ‘well, ok, I know how to do this particular thing.’ It’s like you are carrying an ancient tradition, an oral tradition, a movement tradition, that has been passed on for hundreds of years. Now if that doesn’t deserve a bow of acknowledgement when we start, or when you bow to your partner as when you’re doing a drill, it’s just like acknowledging ‘do you know what we’re doing here? Do you really get it? And if you don’t, that’s ok, but I’m still going to do this until you get it.’

“For me, it’s an act of reverence and acknowledgement of what we’re actually engaged in here. This isn’t a hobby. This is a very deep human being practice. Like many others, like yoga and meditation and tai chi and chi gung and other cultures for sure have their own, whatever it is; it could be music, it could be dance, it could be, where there’s a real intention, that this isn’t just recreational. There’s a deeper meaning here.

“My last little rant on this is that practices like Wing Chun, but not exclusive, they’re one of the few cultural practices that came from a time, an ancient time, where direct experience and truth was paramount. And now we live in information called what “post-truth” now? I mean, we’re just acknowledging it, we’ve been in that [15:12/55:00] for a very long time, we’ve had PR people and spin-doctors and word-whores and all of that to spin reality, advertising, marketing, all of these things to basically convince you of something that isn’t true to shape your behaviour in ways that don’t really serve you. Practices like Wing Chun give you a very direct experience for you to see if it is true or not. So for me this transcends martial arts. This is like a lifeline to sanity. That if we lose these things and we get lost in the digital age of information which can be manipulated and brain-washed, then we’re doomed. We’re already doomed, but we’re going to be even more doomed as a species. So for me having physical kinaesthetic sensitized connection and practices and relationship with other human beings, regardless if it’s martial arts or otherwise, it’s those qualities that is going to be the saviour for our own species or psyche. So that’s what Siu Nim Tau gives you!”

“Should we stop there?”

“Yeah, yeah, unless you have another question.”