

E: “There’s something with *chi sau*, it seems like such a, in some ways, profound training tool—that people down the lineage have brought it forward, and nurtured it, and kept it going—because it’s, in some ways it’s obviously very artificial, but in other ways, it’s training so many levels without you being aware of it and it’s this way so you don’t have to step back each time and say ‘now we’re going to try this’; you can constantly roll and constantly play with that. And it just seems like an amazing kind of thing.”

S: “It is, it’s very brilliant, and it’s a great exercise to develop the skills. It keeps moving you closer and closer to self-defense situations where the *my san jong* drills take it to the next level. Once the *my san jong* drills happen, as soon as you have contact, like bang your hands go somewhere and you’re like, wow. And then there’s a curriculum for *my san jong* drills, which is almost what we did yesterday, which is throwing *jong saus* out, that’s sort of like step one, and then there’s things where it looks like two people are almost fighting. And a lot of things in between. But we continue to build on the successes.

“What else did I want to say? It’ll come back to me: oh, brilliance. I don’t know this for a fact, but intuitively it just feels so right, and I would be shocked if it was otherwise, but I can only imagine that the practice of *chi sau* is some sort of evolution from tai chi push-hands. I mean the movements are different, but the practice and the ideology is the same: it’s like you’re not really learning how to strike somebody, but you’re learning through a repetitious set movements and patterns to train how can I— for them—it’s taking that person’s balance, because I guess the underlying belief is if you can pull them out of their stance, then you can hit them anytime you want with techniques. The way I see the evolution of that is Wing Chun is very much similar to tai chi push-hands but it’s like stripped down, it’s like unplugged. So no big flowery big fluid movements, because for us save time, save energy, save movement is a defining part of our system, so we’re not going to go into a swooping, low, crouching stances of tai chi or wide-legged stances that help for balance, but mobility’s maybe not so good. We’re trying to find the balance between the yin and the yang: the hard and soft; the structure, the relaxation—all those sorts of things. So it is brilliant...it is brilliant, as far as I’m concerned.

“You know, one of the reasons I like, or love I should say, this martial art is, I mean all martial arts want to build good habits and good responses but the way that they go about it is, many of them is, ‘ok, so if someone comes with a right cross and then left uppercut, follow-up, this is what you do, you do this and that,’ or ‘someone swings a stick at you [55:00] this way, then you do this, this, and this,’ and they have this long list of dozens and dozens of responses to dozens and dozens of whatever. And I don’t know if anyone’s going to ever attack you exactly that way; even if they do something quite similar, it might be a slightly different angle, or a different height, or a foot longer weapon, or...and they didn’t train that. Specifically. You don’t have the body memory, whereas the *chi sau* by nature of just the way it is, it gives you key touch points of structure to occupy centerline, of which there can be lots of variants on either side of it, to deal with the subtle changes. So I know I’m not sounding so clear, even as I listen to myself, I’m just trying to find a simpler way to explain that.

“When you train to control the centerline, you can deal with anything. As long as it’s coming on centerline. And as I said before, well, if it’s not coming on centerline, I don’t care about it; I’m just going to step in and do my business and it will be done. But if I think I have to train fifty or sixty basic sort of self-defense scenarios, that’s a lot of things to remember!

“That’s what I really love and trust, is that I know, regardless whether I win or not, I know that on contact I’m not going to freeze, I’m not going...my body, my training is going to come out. Something’s

going to happen. But I know I'm not going to freeze. It's just too part of my being now. Even if I was terrified the moment right up until contact, as soon as the contact is, someone hits the button for that software program, and it lights up, it takes over, because that's stronger than the older patterns or responses or instincts. Presumably.

"So as I go off-road a little bit, when we train our edge, where it's a little bit stressful, a little bit uncomfortable, but not overwhelming, that's how we can reprogram those old stress responses, where we would typically be triggered into say a fight-flight-or-freeze, and now, in small, incremental little playful experiences on our edge where we feel a little bit of the stress, we're doing something different. We're doing something different. We're doing something different. And that doing something different at the beginning activation of your stress response mindfully, several different times, partners, years, is what rewires you. To override your old stress responses. To have this martial brilliance come forward.

"And because sensitivity is such a big part of that, for me what sensitivity is, is sensitivity is 'oh, I know what's called for in this moment; I know what is actually needed in this moment; I know what is appropriate in this moment' as opposed to I overact or underact. That's where that word attunement, that I've used a few times, is the sensitivity allows me to respond appropriately."

E: "It's fascinating too, because it's not a practice of go—Wing Chun's not a practice of I go off into my room and think about how I can change my behaviour, or individual meditation, or something like that, at least not when we're in the club—it's about that relational conversational kind of aspect, working through these things with somebody else's energy, different people's energy. And *chi sau's* a great example of that, where you're constantly learning how to transform yourself while helping the other person, but transforming yourself through the other person's energy."

S: "Exactly! Because even though we set up cooperative drills, and we always bring it to the edge, and when we bring people to the edge, some people might get triggered into their old stress patterns, and then you, as a partner, is like 'oh, wow, how do I deal with this?'; how do I deal with someone who's been told ten times to relax, and they're still coming hard, like it's not getting through. And you can say 'oh, well, then I don't want to play with them in the sandbox anymore', and I mean, and obviously, if it's something really extreme where your personal safety's at risk, yeah, it's the smart thing to do; but, then it's like, don't project your frustration onto that person, own it, and say 'well, how would I deal with this if this was a fight?' What's the solution in Wing Chun here? Maybe you're really comfortable using your structure and holding your ground and you've never really been challenged that way, and now you've got someone else, and then it's like, 'oh, man, I have actually let go on contact and change', but you've never really practiced that. To surrender right away and change, because you're so used to 'nah, I'm going to make you work.' Then you've got to train that.

"You may recall that, every once in a while, I keep reminding students to read the letter [1:00:00] that I wrote to the club a couple of years ago, and one of the things that I made explicit is that because Wing Chun is highly relational, and we train at our edge, which is a bit of a risky zone, and we're cultivating a lot of sensitivity, which is we want people to actually feel their experience, that is a laboratory that is...it can set people up for their shit to come to the surface, so to speak. And it can be expressed physically, it can be expressed emotionally, it can be expressed psychologically, it can be expressed in language. It can come out in ways where we hear or perceive things as aggressive, hurtful, egotistical, whatever, and it can trigger us. And too often, people will, when they get triggered or they get upset, and they have

feelings, their feelings cloud their discernment of what's really going on. And then they will, maybe, with too much embellishment, or too much exaggeration, or too much amplification, they will project the ill onto the other person. Instead of saying, 'oh, I really get triggered when people aren't listening to me; this is an old wound.' Now, I can keep saying: 'well, this person isn't listening to me, this person isn't listening to me,' and make it about them, or I can say, 'well, what is it about this sensitivity that I have when I don't think people...is it because I have low self-esteem, and people don't think I have anything to say, blah blah blah blah.' So those moments are opportunities to actually grow, and transcend your old stuff.

"If you choose to remember, or can remember that that's what's going on. But oftentimes, we will go into fight-flight-or-freeze, and what that means is we have to vilify the other person as being a problem."

E: "So it's a chance to see that there's a hole in your centerline."

S: "Yeah, even where someone's not playing by the rules, or whatever else. What do you think the fight's going to be like? So we obviously what to create a safe, structured environment for your learning, but when you play on the edge, you have to expect there's going to be a little bumps and bruises along the way: physically, emotionally, psychologically, and that you're giving consent to go on that journey. But very few people think this far ahead. It's like, 'ah, I want to learn self-defense skills,' and blah blah blah, and say well, this is going to open you up to more than that.

"And I know I'm really going off-road here, but it's important because what I would say as we see students come and go over the years, I think one of the reasons some students go, other than just life logistics or they say, 'oh, this isn't for me,' or whatever else, is because that stuff finally comes up and they're not willing, able, or ready to deal with that. So they will case-build against a student, an instructor, the club, the art, the whatever else, as a reason for them to be able to go. Which is really sad, because you know it breaks my heart because when they hit those moments that's when they're ripe to be transformed. You cannot involve yourself in a relational practice, even though it's physical, and not think that it's going to change you. Or challenge you. And not just physically, but all parts of you.

"So *chi sau*, for me, is one of those—if it's done well, and I think we do it exceptionally well through the curriculum, scaffolded learning, where people have relationships with each other, it's a safe place to let that stuff come out. And it's also a safe place to be vulnerable with your kung fu brothers and sisters because we're not so macho rah-rah-rah here.

"That's one of the other things about the *chi sau* is the sensitivity. In order for me to have any sensitivity, what's going on with you, I have to have a lot of blocks cleared within myself."

E: "Well, as you were saying yesterday in class, after you pull the trigger, it's empty, there's nothing there. Sort of empty yourself."

S: "Yeah. I mean, I still have structure, and all that, but, but, that's all. I'm not adding any more than necessary; I'm not forcing; I'm not pulling-away; I'm just like <phooow>. Like I'm egoless in that moment;

I'm just fully receiving with what's there, knowing that I can deal with anything that happens. Now, when I don't believe I can deal with anything that happens, or I got fear, or whatever, [1:05:00] then my ego wants to come in and try and control things, or limit the risk artificially, instead of, yeah, I'm fully willing to just feel and trust I'll be able to do something."