



“Learning the techniques without developing the skills will never bring any accomplishment.”

– Ving Tsun Idiom

Message from Sifu



Sifu Jim Kragtwyk training the Pah Chum Do

You Cannot Hide from the Mirrors: This art will transform you, inside and out

When people sign up for a martial art, they typically think the focus and results will mainly be physical and the acquisition of self-defence abilities. This is partially true.

This physical practice, that invites us to harmonize the Faat Do—conceptual framework of this art—will change us in all realms of human experience. Physical, emotional, psychological, relational, behavioral and spiritual transformation will be the result if we persist in our mindful training. Unlike other mindful arts and practices—meditation, yoga and qi gong to name a few—Ving Tsun kung fu is highly relational. We are not alone on our cushion/mat or training forms by ourselves. We are

mostly training with a partner. It is in this relational focus where the opportunity for transformation will arise.

Through a variety of partner exercises, we learn to harmonize centerline and straightline theory, with timing, orientation, sensitivity, balance, coordination and relaxation. In addition, we have guiding principles around economy of time, energy and movement and a handful of supporting ideas and idioms. We are expected to do all this with a grounded horse stance. As our bodies learn to do things in alignment with this conceptual framework, it also invites parallel phenomena in all life realms. When there is physical discomfort in learning a skill, drill or technique, there is also emotional, psychological and relational strain. Imagine all of these qualities finding integration in the non-physical realms.

It is in these moments, when we are on our edge in training, that the opportunity arises to transform old habits and patterns and align with newer and healthier ones. This can be very difficult for some students; to look at things that arise as coming from *within them*, instead of projecting or blaming the other as the cause of their discomfort. Our training partners may likely have triggered something in us, but it is our *stuff* from within that comes out. Yes, sometimes students do present challenging behaviors, communication styles and personalities that can be difficult to work with. Intentional or not, there is a gift here, in that we can change an old habit of reacting to one of responding. In real life, we need skills and abilities to deal with these behaviors as well, so why not focus on it inside of training?

In these situations, it is important to discern what is objectively happening. Otherwise, we feel an intense activation of emotion, which creates distorted judgments and then we project the corresponding judgment/intent onto the other. Unfortunately, I have seen too many incidents of students abandoning their training due to an aversion of looking at the things locked down in their undercurrents, or shadow aspects that come up in the relational nature of this art.

Our training partners are mirrors, reflecting back to us aspects of ourselves. Now sometimes these reflections are as pure as a clear pond on a windless day and sometimes they are markedly distorted, like funhouse mirrors. Trust that there is some semblance of truth in the reflection—even if only 5% true—and if we can use this perspective for our growth, then it is a gift from the other.

I am not saying that if a training partner is egregiously aggressive, mean, unkind, etc. that one should stay in an unhealthy and abusive situation. If that is the case, then get out! What I am suggesting is that working through these less severe activations, in a safe community of supportive people and a grounded practice, is an opportunity to heal old wounds, change entrenched patterns and to grow in life.

One of our attributes in this system is orientation; we face the shape. By this we mean that we turn toward the problem and conflict, not away from it.

Of course, even when training on our edge, we do need a certain baseline of physical and emotional safety to learn and transform versus re-traumatize. The relational etiquette in our lineage is there primarily as a code of conduct to create this level of safety.

The late Grandmaster Moy Yat stated (paraphrased here) that the ultimate purpose of Ving Tsun is to free you from patterns. May this be so . . .

-Sifu Jim Kragtwyk



Senior students training Biu Kwan



Senior students training Jing Tsui

Click the link below (or cut and paste) to see the videos:

This video demonstrates Chi Sau play with lots of "giving hands" and "investing in loss" for the other's benefit.

<https://www.facebook.com/WingChunYYJ/videos/917986808370428/>

Special Events

* September 2017: 5th MYVT Annual Sisters Retreat

* October 2017: Book Club *Tao Te Ching & The Principles of Taoism*

* November 2017: Senior Grand Master Sunny Tang's China Tour

* November 2017: Introduction to Kung Fu Public Seminar

UPCOMING

* December 2017: Club Christmas Party at *Picnic Too*



Congratulations and much gratitude to Mark Watson for hosting an informative, well-organized, instructive and entertaining seminar.



Club shot after Intro Kung Fu seminar

Rachel Shaw, one of our female students at the kwoon brought her daughter in for the first time. This is what Miranda has to say about our club:

"Mom, I saw boys doing kung fu. I didn't know BOYS could do kung fu!"



Sifu Jim Kragtwyk demonstrating with Eben Hensby

Deepening our Understanding

I am writing today to touch on two exciting things I have been involved with that are underway at our Ving Tsun club: first, an informal book club, and, second, a conversation project with our Sifu.

For the book club, a group of us have assembled to discuss books referenced in our club manual. So far, we have read one on martial arts and one on Taoism. In preparation for the latter, our Sihing Tim Lui wisely recommended we first familiarize ourselves with the primary text, and so we also read and discussed the Tao Te Ching. We are a small group of about five people who sit around and discuss a text, primarily as to how it can help deepen our understanding of Ving Tsun, which is also (I would say: 'of course') deepening an understanding of ourselves and the world. We tend to meet every couple of months, and new people are always welcome: new perspectives are invaluable.

As for the conversation project, I have been sitting down with Sifu for about an hour at a time, and I encourage him to share his thoughts on various Ving Tsun topics. There are four topics so far: Siu Nim Tau, Chum Kiu, Biu Chee and Chi Sau. I record these conversations, transcribe them, and [post them on our website](#).

What led me to be involved with these two projects is a combination of various factors. In the first place, I was seeking a way of continuing to practice outside of the club, and in other ways than just the physical. Ving Tsun offers a deep philosophy, extending beyond martial application, potentially permeating all areas of life. To tap into some of that, I thought reading some philosophical texts would help. What better place to start than books cited in our manual by our Sigung? And who better to start with than Sifu? So I've been sitting down with Sifu, encouraging him to share, and recording and transcribing the results. Now we can read the words of our Sifu, or listen to them, savouring the cadence and articulation.

I wanted to inspire Sifu to share this knowledge in a differently-transmittable way. When one has spent so much of one's life steeped in a tradition, philosophy and outlook, well, one can be moved to want to help it spread in ways it might not otherwise. Sifu is like a knowledge-bank, an experience-bank. Those of us at the Victoria club will now embody ways of being in our bodies and minds, transmitted by Sifu. But not all bodies and minds can come into contact with a teacher in the same way. My hope is that the recordings (audio and textual), will allow for a different kind of transmission. It is in the same way that the texts we read in the reading group extend to broad audiences, leaping distance and time, and finding new receptive ground to root in to.

And so it is that, just as we train relationally with our brothers and sisters, so Sifu and I sit and discuss together. Just as the audio and transcriptions are out there for others to join together in new configurations, so the reading group consists of us reading texts and then coming together to discuss them. So these projects hopefully also draw us closer as a community of people interested in learning aspects of a total way of being.

-Eben Hensby

Training

Each newsletter features two discussions: an account from a particular new student, and an account from a senior student. These write-ups are focused on what that individual is working on with their training. This way, we can appreciate different perspectives rooted in different skill levels and experience.



Helen Guilding receiving her brown sash from Sifu Jim Kragtwyk

Train Form to Leave Form

About a year ago, I began to reflect on the number of students who left their training at around blue/brown sash level. There are always people whose circumstances prevent them from training further, but it made me wonder if for some, it may have been because they were stuck at a plateau in their learning. Like most people, I have hit plateaus throughout my training. There were even days I could have sworn I was getting worse. Wanting to find ways to get over these plateaus, I started to focus my thoughts and reading around different approaches to learning and skill development. The more I studied this area, the more I realised that I had heard all these ideas in class many times before. Ideas like investing in loss, emptying your cup and training your edge.

For me, it seems the most important thing about training any skill is knowing *what* you are training. This might sound obvious, but I overlooked the importance of this for years. On numerous occasions throughout my training, I was asked by a senior

student or instructor what I was working on. I couldn't tell them. I would often reply that I would work on whatever they wanted me to. I couldn't tell them, because I was not engaged mindfully with my own training. I would turn up to class, listen, try to perform the tasks given to me as best I could, then repeat the following class. While this process got me by, it wasn't until I started making myself a more active participant in my own learning process that I felt my Ving Tsun really start to improve.

To be an active participant in your own training, you have to know the theory. You have to know the conceptual framework of our Ving Tsun system (Faat Do). Without this, you cannot self-correct or engage fully with your own training; you are always relying on others for direction. There is also a big difference between knowing what is written in our lineage curriculum and having an understanding of it. When asked recently to give a definition of Chi Sau, my response was confused and missing elements. Something which I thought would be easy to define because I train it all the time, I found quite difficult. For me, the process of defining concepts and theories in a clear and concise manner has started to manifest itself in the clarity of my physical techniques. As Sigung Walter Jacimczuk would put it, my Ving Tsun is becoming less muddy. It really does help to know what you are training.

Using theoretical knowledge to advance your skill training is only part of it though. We cannot train our nervous system through theoretic reasoning; we need to physically practice the skills in a repetitive and consistent manner. Turning up regularly to class is obviously a good place to start, but in order to keep growing, we need to find out what it is we personally need to work on in our training. In other words, we need to discover our limitations. I have made most of these discoveries by training outside the formal class setting. In a more "playful" environment, you get to really see how your kung fu expresses itself. You can train your edge, training at the outer reaches of your skill level and discovering where your current skill level has its limitations. You might notice, for instance, how excess tension

in your arms impedes flow and speed; notice when you lose balance, or when you close your eyes in fear when an attack comes in at speed. Having trained in this more playful dynamic environment, you can take what you need to work on back to the classroom setting and work through the issues thoughtfully and slowly—breaking them down, going back to the basics.

Interestingly, because I am now more engaged with my training, I am noticing that rather than not knowing what I am working on, I have started to feel somewhat overwhelmed with the details. I have realised that it is quality of learning I am aiming for. I cannot possibly be working on everything at once and expect to achieve any depth of understanding. In order that I don't forget the points that come up in class while I am working through one or two issues in my Ving Tsun, I have started to keep very short journal notes after training. This way I can refer back to them later and work through them when the time is right.

The one learning method we hear about at the kwoon from very early on is *investing in loss*. To Invest in loss, you have to understand that "failure" is essential to learning. As with a lot of people, I have always been afraid of failure. So for me, trying over the years to cultivate investment in loss in my training has been hugely beneficially for me personally, both inside and outside the kwoon. The fear of failing prevents you from training your edge, and is at the peripheries of our skill where growth occurs. In Josh Waitkins book *The Art of Learning*, he uses the analogy of the anorexic hermit crab. When a hermit crab outgrows its current shell, it must leave and find a new, larger shell. The transition between the shells will leave the crab temporarily exposed and vulnerable. Being fearful of this journey, the anorexic hermit crab starves itself in order to remain in its safe but small shell. The fear of failing in my training is still there, but now I try to recognise it and push myself to train my edge despite it. The more I do this, the easier it gets. I have had many training sessions recently where I have not been able to let go of this fear and my ego

has taken over. I can feel the effect of this very directly in my techniques. Fearing failure, I try too hard to make a technique work, but doing so hinders the effectiveness of the technique. I am focused too much on the end result of the technique. When I am too attached to making that technique happen, I over commit and/or get tense. Letting go of fear, ego and the thought process is essential for flow.

Another idea I have been playing with recently in my training and which ties into the above, is the idea of 'training form to leave form'. This can be interpreted as practicing technical methods mindfully, with the express purpose of integrating them into the subconscious mind. Once in the subconscious, you can let go of the analysis of process, thus enabling flow. Interestingly, I was reading an article a few months ago about this. It stated that being overly analytical of techniques while training can inhibit implicit learning; that is, learning that allows you to perform tasks and skills unconsciously. The article cited found a fascinating paradox that, while being analytically mindful of your practice can help you to avoid forming bad habits, that same mindfulness impeded the implicit learning of good habits. Implicit memory is not learnt through cerebral cognition, but instead is created through plasticity, when actions are repeated consistently over a period of time.

This suggested to me that, while training, one should engage in the given technique mindfully for a while to ensure that no bad habits are formed, then continue the same technique with an empty mind, to allow the process for implicit learning to become fully realised. With this in mind, I have been applying a cyclical process to training sessions. For the first while, I will try to consciously think about whether my technique is "good," then, when I think I have everything right, I will repeat this without thought. The first step helps ensure quality; the second, subconscious integration and flow. I will then repeat the first step to make sure that my technique is maintaining quality. I am finding this last step important, as very often I catch something wrong with my structure. If, in dynamic Chi Sau, or

even a fight, we are concerned with form and technique, we will not be effective.

By training these micro processes mindfully and consistently, we will get to a point where our mind no longer has to be concerned with the process and our actions will be instinctive. We have trained form to leave form.

Letting go of the attachment to the process and the ego is obviously not very easy and requires a lot of practice. I am certainly a long way from being able to perform like this in any consistent way, but the times where I am able to, my Ving Tsun suddenly feels alive and everything flows.

From the moment I started practicing Ving Tsun, I fell in love with it but now I feel I am just as much in love with the process of learning and studying it.

- Helen Guilding, Brown Sash



Helen Guilding demonstrating with Sifu Victor Chung from San Francisco's SITO Club



*Natalie Rogers training with Rachel Shaw
at MYVT Annual Sisters Retreat*

“I learn by going where I have to go.”

Theodore Roethke, The Waking

Prior to starting my Ving Tsun training, I spent a decade searching and wandering. Much of that experience took place while living, travelling and studying yoga in India. During that time, I told myself that I would walk through the wilderness of life with as much nobility and courage as I could, even if the path and destination were unclear. Yoga has taught me much about inner development and refinement, however dealing with fear has proven to be the most difficult part for me. It is this desire, to find my courage, that ultimately led me to Ving Tsun.

Fear takes many forms and has many triggers. For myself, there is the immediate physical fear of being attacked, or witnessing someone else being attacked, and not being able to defend myself or someone else. On a subtle level, there are many other kinds of fear. Fear of failing. Fear of being inadequate. Existential fear. Intense social anxiety. All of these can be extremely debilitating. So, when we speak about training our edge, I am slowly starting to see that, for me, it is not just the physical edge. It is all of the aforementioned elements, and probably

more, that I am not consciously aware of. It is all of those things that limit me from reaching what I am capable of.

I have come to realise that the way in which we train, in the context of being a “kung fu family”, is very important in regards to confronting fear. At first this was very difficult for me, as I am not one who bonds easily with new people. However, training in a traditional club atmosphere implies a high level of respect, understanding and compassion for every person we train with, learn from and teach. This is what makes our club feel like a safe space in a not-so-safe world. Personally, it makes me more willing to take risks and to step into those fearful places inside of myself. This September, I was fortunate enough to attend the Moy Yat Ving Tsun Sisterhood’s fifth annual Sisters Retreat, and through that I have seen how far these relationships extend. We are connected to so many people who can support us on our journeys!

Life continues to feel like a wilderness, but in many ways I feel better equipped to live in it. Even at such an early stage, I can feel how Ving Tsun is helping me to both externalise and test the things I have cultivated through yoga. It brings to mind the analogy of placing two mirrors so that they face each other, they will reflect each other to infinity, until it is not clear where one starts and the other begins. With the support of my kung fu family, I hope to continue this path towards a life less governed by fear, so that I can face any situation with clarity, relaxation and courage.

- Natalie Rogers, Red Sash



Senior students training the Biu Chee Form



Biu Kwan á la Mark Watson and Raj Pal

A Note from Raj Pal in Costa Rica

Brothers and Sisters,

I miss you guys!

We left Canada mid-August by car and stopped in Colorado to settle documents. We then flew to Costa Rica just before September 1st, just in time for Priya and Neve to start school. We brought only what we could carry, leaving the rest of our stuff in storage in Denver.

The whole family is quite entertained by the bugs here. For those of you who came to the farm retreat a few years ago, you may recall Priya & Neve catching grasshoppers, cooking them over a lighter and gobbling them up. True to form, we did the same here. Though the grasshoppers are just a little larger here. Keeping in mind that I have large hands, [here are some photos](#).

For the first time in almost 9 years, I took almost a full month off of training!! It was devastating... I don't recommend it. Mind you, my shoulders felt better than they've felt in a long time! I started back slowly with 4 of the 6 forms daily (I didn't have a kwan or mook jong). Missing my favorite kwan, a local Tico (Douglas) had a 9 foot kwan made for me out of local teak (not as heavy as Sifu & Sihing-Mark's iron wood, but it feels pretty close!). Here's a [photo in front of mi casa](#). Being me, excited to have my beloved kwan to train with, I overdid it and tweaked both forearms and an elbow and couldn't touch it for about 2 weeks. I just recently started back with it s-l-o-w-l-y. Once I feel like I own it again, I'll look into having a mook jong made out of teak as well!

I haven't yet created "Sunny Tang Costa Rica", but am actively working on some ideas. Sihing-Michael lives

nearby as well, but he's been traveling ever since I've arrived. I'm looking forward to training with him once he returns. I have found that few people here have heard of Ving Tsun. So I've been actively talking it up to spread the word. There is a presence of Muay Thai, Jiu-Jitsu and Tae Kwon Do here, and some of the folks here who regularly train those are interested in the differences in our training philosophies. Aside from martial arts, there's a ton of yoga and endless surfing. Together, these have built the community in which we now live.

I haven't forgotten the importance of living the Faat Do.

To name the attributes:

- Relaxation - Yoga, stretching, listening to the sounds of the jungle...
- Orientation - If you turn your back to a wave, you'll get clobbered.
- Coordination - If you aren't in tune with the location of your vehicle's tires, the steering wheel and the crazy number and size of potholes here, it will cost you (\$ in repairs). We now drive a Toyota 4Runner that's been lifted to help-[photo](#).
- Balance - I learned that I have very little core strength and balance by simply trying to sit on a floating surfboard... let alone stand on one! Also... don't work too much, don't surf too much, don't over train the kwan, don't stretch too much, all while focusing on spending just the right amount of time with family!
- Timing - Paddle too late, you miss the wave; Paddle too soon, you get clobbered... and it hurts about as bad as when Sifu is practicing ginger-fist on you...
- Sensitivity - For me, it is harder to feel the wave through a surfboard, than it is to feel the tip of your opponent's kwan through yours in chi-kwan.



Raj and Ailish Pal, Nosara Costa Rica

I don't think we're spending an excessive amount of time on the beach, but apparently enough that a local real estate company who posts a photo daily caught us twice within a few days! Of all the people on the beaches here, I guess we were the most photogenic! [Photo#1](#) [Photo#2](#). Ailish and I both agree that if they saw us actually surfing, they'd retract those photos!

I once asked Sifu if he'd ever really had to use the physical side of his Ving Tsun Kung Fu. His response was "No, but I sometimes daydream!"

My answer to the same question now is "Yes". I won my recent fight, but it wasn't graceful. Ip Man, Sijo and Sigung have stories of their fights against multiple opponents... but my encounter dealt with MANY more opponents than all of them! Naturally, I don't have photo proof of my encounter to show you the *dim* and *tan gerks* or deadly *huen mas* or other on-the-fly improvised techniques I used, but [here is a video](#) of how deadly another gang of my opponents were. I later learned that these are army ants and when they intrude into your house, you're supposed to go out for lunch since they find, hunt and kill scorpions like this, along with other unwanted critters.

I am still on the club mailing list and actively watching the progress of you all by the posts and hours summary lists. We will likely be visiting sometime this summer. I hope to be able to "feel" the progress you've made as well as meet the new members!

Also, remember... we have a spare room with a queen sized bed if you feel like a trip to Nosara, Costa Rica is in order for a little holiday, visit, relaxation and training. In the meantime, if you would like more information, stories, photos or just to say "hello", you know how to get a hold of me. If not, ask a Sihing/Sije and they'll share my contact info.

Lots of love... and always stay on your centerline!

-Raj Pal



Priya and Neve Pal with the biu kwan

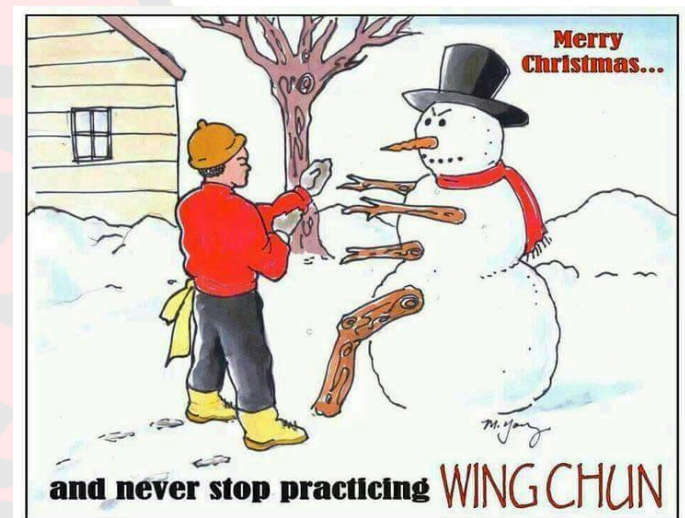
Congratulations to Arne Pederson for attaining his red sash level during the last quarter. Excellent work!

Welcome to Our New Students:

- Dustin General
- Mitchell Koren

Welcome Back

- Greg Berbenuk
- Norman Stainer



Edited by Heidi Erhardt

Copy Edited by Natalie Rogers

Note: We use the spelling Ving Tsun which late Grand Master Ip Man used to differentiate our Kung Fu from the various branches.

Please check out our Facebook Page

[\(@WingChunYYJ\)](#) and website

[\(victoriawingchun.com\)](#) for more information about Ving Tsun and Sifu Jim Kragtwyk's [talks](#) on various aspects of the system and [instructional videos](#).