



“Patience makes peaceful,
step back can see the whole world.”

~ Ving Tsun Maxim

Message from Sifu



Sifu Jim Kragtwyk Training the Pah Chum Do

The Keys to the Kingdom or Queendom: Ving Tsun - A Philosophy for Life

As the saying goes, “Sometimes you don’t know what you don’t know.” Most people who join a martial arts school join for reasons of self-defence or fitness and conditioning. Some other reasons could

include: social connection, improved physical and emotional health or an activity that isn’t oriented around substance use. What many people don’t realize is that each martial art has an inherent philosophy about living, whether it is taught explicitly or mined implicitly from teaching and training.

In our Ving Tsun system, we have both an implicit and explicit life philosophy. Most people only view Ving Tsun from the context of self-defence. But self-defence is just a small part of this profound gift, a gift I am calling the “keys to the kingdom” in life. Our philosophy is explicitly outlined in our conceptual framework (Faat Do). The theories of centerline and straightline; attributes of relaxation, sensitivity, coordination, balance, timing and orientation; principles of save time, energy and movement as well as many supporting ideas, etiquette and idioms, all contribute to this embodied life philosophy, equally relevant to martial and non-martial realms.

Laid out in front of us is a time tested and *sane* way of being in this world. This *tao* (way) is an ancient understanding that evolved over time, through nature, geography and culture. Its test of relevance has always been through a proven and embodied experience, not blind faith to an idea that is not connected and grounded in experience. As our consciousness as a species and culture is weighted more and more on the intellect and less and less on somatic, emotional and cultural intelligence, we can see the consequences: our endless consumption, violence, war and unsustainable way of living. We are living on borrowed time.

The gift of embodied practices such as Ving Tsun Kung Fu includes an integrated perspective of a sustainable philosophy for living. The intellectual aspects of the Ving Tsun system came from direct physical experiences and consequences of said experiences. And not only the immediate consequences of those experiences, but also the longer-term ramifications of them. For example, winning the fight at all costs may save the day, but may cause even more problems later on (enemies, harm to another human, karma to name a few). Longer-term wisdom teaches us how to prevent or avoid violence and how to allow your opponent to save face, if possible.

Another example of an implied philosophy might be the emphasis on strength development, physical muscle armour and an ability to take a hit. Of course, the positive intent of these abilities is to help one survive a fight. No argument there. Yet what are the unintended or unknown consequences? If I put on physical armour and learn to take a hit, in some ways I am also armouring and desensitizing myself to all things in life. The good things don't get in either. This desensitization can have profound impacts on our overall health and well-being. We can become incapable of listening to and responding to the subtle messages from life and other people, and therefore have a limited ability to respond and adapt accordingly. We can become "impenetrable" to other people—important people—in our lives. They give up on trying to "reach us" and then we are surprised when one day they end their relationship with us. We act shocked, but the messages were there all along. This brute strength "toughen up buttercup" is also a time-limited ability for most people. Will this attitude still serve us, let alone will we be capable of doing it anymore, when we are older? Too often, I see people who train hard styles not able to do it later in life, or they begin the path of chronic injuries.

In the Ving Tsun system, our life philosophy is to prevent and avoid unhealthy conflict at all costs. Understanding the full spectrum of consequences of not doing so—for self, others and society—is far-reaching and profound. Instead of brute force, physical armour and an ability to take multiple hits in order to defeat an assailant, Ving Tsun prefers a different philosophy. To highlight this, I will expand on one of our two theories: centerline.

We train to occupy, control and return to centerline as a primary focus in all of our training. In controlling the centerline, in theory, we have the constant ability, *to never get hit and to hit anytime we want*. That is quite a bold statement. Yet it *is* a theory. Our job is to apply this theory in our training so the likelihood of it happening, if needed for a real situation, will be enhanced. This also applies to the "toughen up" philosophy previously mentioned. It does not guarantee you will win the fight, it is just a theory to practice in hopes it will improve your chances in a fight. So the question then becomes which philosophy are you *consciously* choosing in your martial arts and life journey?

See all the theories, principles, attributes, etc. in the second paragraph of my article and ask yourself, "Would I like more of these in my life?"

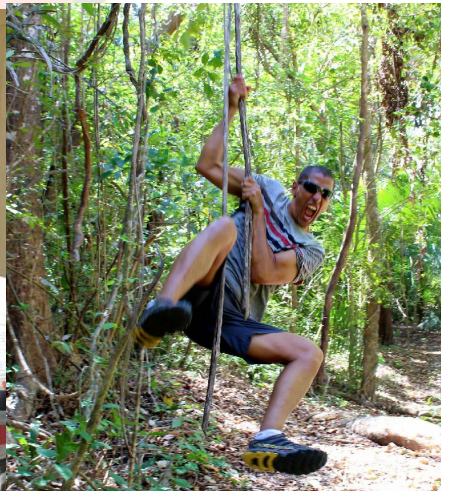
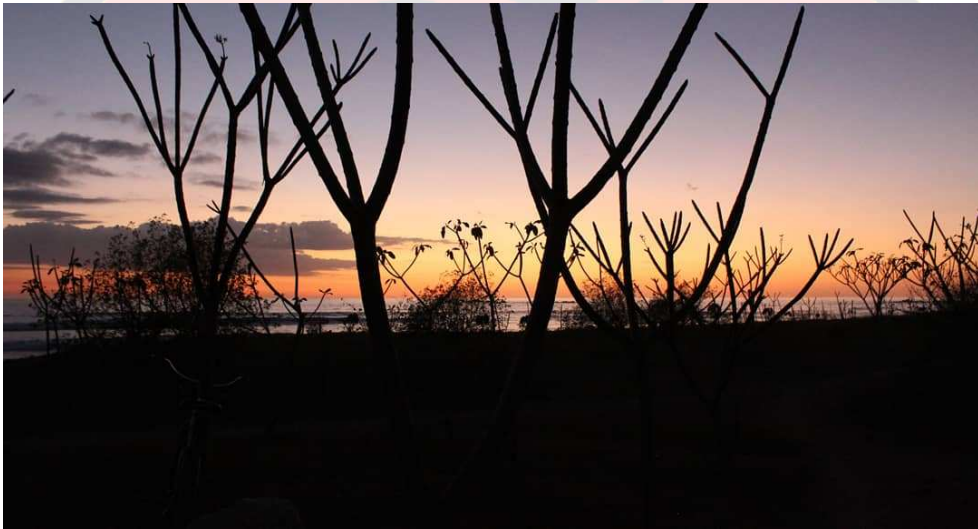
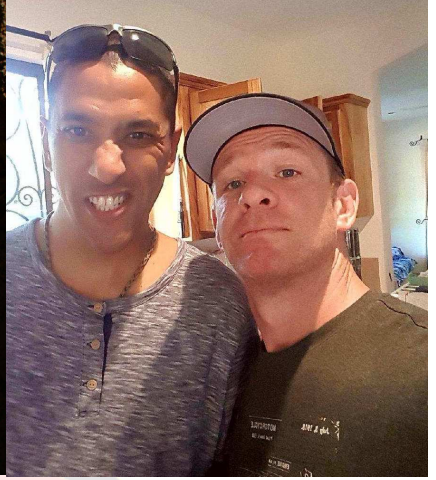
-Sifu Jim Kragtwyk



Kwai Sat (Knee Pinning)

Ving Tsun Reunion - Costa Rica

Mark Watson & Raj Pal



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.



Instructor Tim Lui Demonstrating the Kwan

Foundation

At this point in my training, I'm finding that my focus is changing. I began learning how to punch and kick the Ving Tsun way, and now I punch and kick my own way, using the tools I've learned. As a beginner, I didn't understand how to form a proper punch... knuckles would bleed from the wall bag and my wrists were sore from the wrong alignment. It took time for me to slowly develop the proper punch. Then I could hit the bag for a long time without any issues. Once I felt comfortable punching, I could play with how my body was connecting with my punch. Incorporating shifting and stepping, I got to learn my proper distancing and how to find the shortest range where I'm able to hit with a fair amount of power.

At my beginner's stage, the way I thought about the whole system was so different compared to now. At first, I concentrated on learning the basic drills. I'd work them over and over until I was comfortable doing them. Everything was physical. I was trying to get my body to move the way I saw my Sifu move. I tried my best to emulate his motions and positions to the point of being overly critical. What was his toe position? Where were his hands? How was his weight distributed? So many things to think about. I had to get everything *right* or else *I was wrong*. It's good to be critical of your skills, so that you are confident in using them. But this is where I learned that being critical of my *skills* is different than being critical of my *emulation*.

I soon realized that everything came down to the basics. If my basic foundation was good—hand structures, proper footwork, forward intent—then everything else would just piece together. Basic hand drills led to partner drills, which led to single-handed Chi Sau and then to double-handed Chi Sau. Everything always came back to the basics. Good Chi Sau came from a good understanding of Bong, Tan and Fook, which goes back to the forms. Siu Nim Tau taught me my hands, proper position from elbow to wrist and forward energy. Chum Kiu showed me body unity with my hands: connecting my hands and feet so they could work together with proper timing. Biu Chee and the wooden dummy showed me how to recover back to Siu Nim Tau and Chum Kiu when I've lost my position in relation to the other body or find myself in a compromised position.

First I needed to learn how and why the forms worked. Then my focus was how to learn to use the forms in relation to my body and how I move. Finding my own way of understanding those positions was the beginning of me learning my own kung fu. I had to make those techniques work for me and make those tools my own so that they would become second nature. I remember times when I'd be doing Chi Sau with my Si-dai Mark and something would happen, but we couldn't explain the technical part of it. Things just happened and it worked out, with no thought involved.

As I progressed through the system, my understanding of the concepts and theories changed. And as time went by, I applied the concepts and theories in the drills. Doing the drills became different, as I did them more and more.

Being mindful of what I am doing during training is also really important, as it sets a tone for how I intend my body to act. If my mind is somewhere else and I'm not focused on training, then there's no point in training. I'm just wasting my time. It's the same thing I've seen at the gym: people go to the gym to exercise but they end up just standing around chatting and lounging, getting nothing done. I think about our straightline theory when I ask myself, "What is my point in training?" If I'm at the gym, I exercise, if I'm at the kwoon, I train that drill over and over again. I can never practice enough if I want to be good at something.

There's more than one way to look at something, as we all see the world in our own way. So in my training, I want to apply different perspectives on how to do something and see what I can learn from them. There is so much information out there about Ving Tsun from so many different sources. The more I understand Ving Tsun as a language, I am able to see what these various instructors are trying to do with their Ving Tsun, how they express themselves.

I've learned a lot practicing Ving Tsun. This system has so many great things that come from its existence, like how the concepts and theories can be applied to our lives to make them better and more efficient.

Thank you to all my training brothers and sisters from past to present. You've all had a hand in building my knowledge. I could never thank my Sifu enough for all the time and effort he put into me and my Ving Tsun. Thank you Sifu. Keep training and work hard for the goals you want!

- Instructor Tim Lui, Black Sash



Jay Messenger Training Siu Nim Tau

Ving Tsun as a Path to Recovery

When I first heard about Ving Tsun Kung Fu, I had no idea it would impact my life the way it has. I had asked James, a great friend of mine, to find a form of hand-to-hand combat for me to study. I had worked on the mental, emotional and spiritual aspect of my recovery from addiction for over two years at that point. The physical part was to learn how to defend myself, which I had always wanted to do because of my size. I figured it would help reinforce the other parts of my recovery as well. It was a win all around, as far as I was concerned.

We looked up Ving Tsun in Victoria, and not only was there a kwoon, but it was in the building next to where I was living at the time. So we went in one night and sat down with the man who was teaching the class. He asked questions and paid close attention to our answers. I came back a few days later and started my new journey as a kung fu kid. I don't remember a lot about the first classes except that I didn't have a clue what the hell I was doing.

I was really having a hard time. One thing about the second class I will never forget was watching my Si-je push my other Si-je across the room. Keep in mind I have never seen anything like this in my whole life. In that moment, my perspective changed completely. I understood immediately that what these people were doing was learning how to seriously defend themselves.

I have also studied tactics and strategies in warfare for the better part of my life so I was super excited about Ving Tsun because it totally made sense: the moves, no signs of what's to come, the speed, power and momentum. How simple and to the point it was. The direct version.

Not only am I really learning how to defend myself, I have gained, and am continuing to gain, lifelong friends and family through kung fu.

I learned to dance because I wanted to work on the coordination of my body and timing. It was something I had always wanted to learn how to do. Now, with Ving Tsun, I get to work with others to learn how to defend our lives. I get to watch all of us grow into better human beings because of the time, energy and love we put into ourselves.

It is a very big honor for me to get the opportunity to write something about how I feel about our amazing art. Ving Tsun has challenged me in ways that push me to the breaking point at times. It has taught me the impossible. And the crazy part is, I am still a baby here. I've just started my journey and can't wait to see what is next. I love how I get to express Ving Tsun in my daily grind. It is by far, one of the coolest parts of my life today. I thank God every day for this opportunity.

Thanks to all of you for showing up to life and this art. When I first came around, my best friend was moving three hours away. It was the first time I didn't have my best friend close and I was far away from home, all by myself. You all took me in when I really needed family and acted accordingly. For that, I am very grateful.

-Jason (Jay) Messenger, White Sash

Click the link below (or cut and paste) to see Sifu Jim Kragtwyk and Instructor Mark Watson engaged in Chi Sau: <https://www.facebook.com/WingChunYYJ/videos/917986808370428/>



Senior Students Training Chi Sau on the Platform: Minimizing Movement with a Focus on Clean Technique While Controlling Their Partner

Special Events

* December 2017: Annual Club Christmas Party

UPCOMING

- * March 2018: Ving Tsun Intensive with Sigung Walter
- * April 2018: Sifu's Wedding Reception, Victoria
- * October 2018: 6th Annual Kung Fu Sister's Retreat



Soren Leon Wilson Reddekop with the Kwan

Welcome to our newest student, Heather Pesta

Edited by Heidi Erhardt

Copy Edited by Natalie Rogers

Photos: Mark Watson, Heidi Erhardt & Jarrad Reddekop