



“When you should hit, hit. When you shouldn’t, don’t.
Don’t when you can’t. Don’t when you mustn’t.”

— Ving Tsun Idiom



Sifu Jim Kragtwyk, speaking to the importance of the Bai Si Ceremony in Ottawa

Message from Sifu

Sensitivity Revisited

I know I wrote on this topic for our last newsletter. Current circumstances make it very apropos to speak of it from a more personal experience. In that last edition, I spoke of how the attribute of sensitivity is part of the Ving Tsun ideology, more commonly known as the Faat Do or Conceptual Framework. I spoke of how applying the Faat Do in non-martial realms can be a very powerful life-compass to help us navigate the dynamism of life’s flow, which can often be turbulent, confusing and even traumatic.

For the last month, I have been sitting in an ever increasingly humbled place. I sustained a significant lower back injury while playing tennis with a friend. For most of the last month, my life has been significantly different than what it has been and how I

want it to be, for equally healthful and egoic reasons. I am used to being a highly physically active person, regularly involved in training kung fu, weight training, ecstatic dance, biking, yoga, swimming and tennis. Instead I have been resting, lying down and, on a good day, able to go for very brief walks and maybe a couple of very slow breast-stroke lengths at the pool. It has been painful to sit and fatiguing to stand.

Not to be a totally disempowered person in life, I have been engaged in my healing with a variety of therapies and modalities to support my recovery, all with the expectation that the injury would resolve itself within two to five days, as it has done in the past. Well, the past is not relevant to the present anymore.

During this last month, I have had to literally sit with myself bereft of the most impactful and frequently-used wellness and coping skill that I have in my arsenal: physical activity. I have noticed the challenges to my mood and emotional regulation, with my perspective shifting from positivity and humour to cynicism and disorientation. I recall an adage from one of my most esteemed teachers to “Die a thousand times before you die.” This period of sitting with myself has absolutely been a time of grieving a death of some part of myself and has been very uncomfortable, scary and even rage-inducing at times. Having accepted and surrendered to the things I cannot control, a new phase of this cycle emerged: an opportunity for deep listening to what wants, dare I say needs, to be reborn within myself.

I recall lamenting over the last several months that, as blessed as my life has been, it has been too dynamic. I recall half-seriously stating that I feel like I have been living Biu Chee for the last few years. For those in the know, we only want to use Biu Chee as a last resort, not as a way of life. It is risky and unsustainable, great

for transient moments of surviving in life, but not for thriving in life. A week or two before the injury, I recall lamenting how I wanted a stay-cation so that I could ground, resource and enjoy my sweet home, intimate relationship and community. Still, I witnessed myself researching plans for unnecessary travel, retreats and professional projects. Clearly, while I had the awareness and sensitivity of what my highest being was wanting and needing, I was not listening and responding with action.

So as the saying goes, “Be careful what you ask for, because you might just get it!” This was not the month-long stay-cation I was imagining, and it is not over yet. So now, humbled, sensitized and grateful for the smallest of abilities and experiences, I surrender more to the will of the Tao and listen with ever-more sensitive ears to what is being asked of me instead of to what my habits of the past have dictated. May I respond accordingly.

- Sifu Jim Kragtwyk



Grandmaster Walter Jakimczuk and Sifu Jim Kragtwyk, with extended kung fu family in Ottawa for Bai Si Ceremony of Sebastian Malette and Craig Jee



Victoria kung fu family

Club Camping Trip



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.



Jarrad Reddekop practising Chum Kiu

Some Thoughts on Kung Fu as a Practice

As most of you will know (since you are my training partners), I have been working through my blue sash curriculum for a little while now—about a year and a half. For me this has been an exceedingly interesting time, with new material and expectations that have challenged me to develop and refine my kung fu on various fronts. Things like learning the dummy form, starting some of the basic pole movements, My San Jong, and so on, have all brought into awareness a range of micro skills I need to work on and integrate, and they also (thankfully) provide techniques and opportunities

for doing so. But perhaps most broadly, I feel like the major challenge put to me in my training lately is this: now that I've been introduced to most of the basic vocabulary of movement provided by our Ving Tsun system, can I get these things to a point where they are readily available, harmonized, and able to flow freely with less and less scripting of encounters? In short, can I make my kung fu work?

One of the biggest blockages for me at this time—a set of limits I am constantly hitting up against and trying to get past—has to do with relaxation and also with intent. How can I be relaxed and sensitive enough not to get locked into fighting someone else's energy with my structure, but instead absorb and subtly guide it, gathering my hands to centerline with good distancing, and striking without telegraphing? How can I stay relaxed enough that my trapping hand will be light and sensitive while my hitting hand strikes with power and intent from my whole body? How can I better feel openings when these are fleetingly presented by a skilled partner—being aware and focused enough to take advantage of them and move in at the right time? Right now, I feel I often notice these openings just a little too late, just the moment after they were there. But it is only ever a question of a passing instant, and once these opportunities are gone of course you cannot assume they will recur.

As I try to work through this particular iteration of (familiar) problems—frustrating as it can sometimes be—I am constantly reminded of something in the nature of kung fu that I have always loved: it is a practice that provides opportunities to both continually diagnose and also to transform ourselves in ways that tend to be far-reaching. A given starting-point for reflection might be simple movements of the body, joint positioning, or whatever else—which seems straightforward enough. What didn't I do correctly, and what would the correct movement be to deflect, neutralize, counter, etc.? But things become much more complicated, especially once it becomes a matter of making these things come out and perform themselves reliably, in time, in dynamic or

unscripted encounters. As we know, deeply engrained patterning and semi-conscious responses; emotional states; how openly and attentively you are able to comport yourself as a human being in relationship with others; your ability to focus with both body and mind as an integrated whole—all this enters into the question. Before long it is obvious that, engaged fully, our kung fu is a rich embodied philosophy that offers a path for cultivating oneself into or at least towards a certain state—a balanced mode of relating that harmonizes our theories, attributes, and principles—which this tradition takes to be best or most wise. You are engaged as a total self in kung fu, and so progressing in kung fu requires a certain willingness to work on that self and admit that it needs working on.

Take my issue of relaxation: what is really going on here? One aspect of this is probably something like fear and (though one hates to admit it) even a sense of ego and investment/attachment to which that fear is connected. Why freeze up and get tense in Chi Sau? Why is it so easy to get stuck in a place of clashing with another's structure on the centerline where it is so hard to get past or in? Sometimes it is simply a question of not yet having learned to be fluid enough, of still investing too much in particular moments, of trying to make a particular instant of contact into something it is not. In short I am planning and trying to control; I am apparently still uncomfortable inhabiting the true nature of dynamic Chi Sau, which requires aliveness and responsiveness, precisely not conscious thinking/planning/judgment. Giving up *that* habit is a hard one for a guy coming out of a PhD.

Underlying this may be even deeper problems, such as fear of failing, and fear of being hit, which trigger a certain rigid defensive mode. Sometimes the sense of ego involved here is as crass as having an image of myself as someone who should be able to do a particular kung fu technique successfully by now, and not wanting to have that idea smashed to pieces (as it regularly is). But even more intractable, I think, is the ego present in the simple fear of being hit (which seems to take place at an even more

instinctual or less-conscious level). But as I am regularly shown in Chi Sau, if I cannot give up this fear I will always predictably freeze up at certain points—which means that with a skilled partner I will actually *be hit*. (Damn it!)

So to learn relaxation to the point of being able to make my kung fu actually work, I think there is really a whole continual process of letting go and emptying oneself out, divesting oneself of these emotional and egoistic blockages. And again, I am most often not consciously aware that I am coming to my kung fu in this way, bringing all of this baggage. Yet *there it is*, displayed through my hands. So at some level, I am simply discovering for myself what our Sifu has often said, that kung fu is, amongst other things, an astonishingly subtle art for revealing truth about oneself. The likelihood that the problems I am encountering in kung fu are not showing up somewhere else in my life seems, moreover, roughly nil. For example, I think the problems I have outlined above are probably inseparable from a general problem of how I can be more relaxed and comfortable with others. Importantly, the path we are shown is to overcome this baggage, not by way of repression, but through training that calls this stuff out and slowly breaks it down and recrafts one's habits and general way of being.

This is just one set of examples of how I continue to find my kung fu journey rewarding—in ways that are connected to our shared endeavour of developing skill in physical fighting but also extend well beyond it. I am continually humbled by how, at each turn and stage in my development, kung fu poses to me questions that only grow increasingly refined, subtle, and profound, and which persistently disrupt me and keep me alive to the continual problem of how to exist in the world in a good way. And so, almost five years into my kung fu journey, what can I say? If the path ahead of me doesn't look any shorter, at least it's my kind of medicine.

- Jarrad Reddekop, *Blue Sash*



Dustin General with Sifu, practising Dim Gerk

Ving Tsun: More Than Self-Defence

I decided to give Ving Tsun a try after being introduced to the Ip Man movies on Netflix. In these movies, Ip Man (Donnie Yen) fights his way through multiple opponents using flashy moves and amazing techniques, usually without breaking a sweat. I thought it looked cool and, having minimal self-defence training myself, it seemed like an interesting martial art to try.

At the start of my first class, I was taught the first section of Siu Nim Tao, which I really did not understand the importance of at the time. Now I know it's 'the little idea'. It is in this form that we begin building our foundation upon which all other techniques are built. We learn to focus on our horse stance, to repeatedly move our hands along the centerline, and to focus on the elbow placement, just to name a few aspects.

During the second half of my first class, I learned some basic hand techniques. I was paired with my Si-je Natalie, who was asked to teach me blocking punch. During this drill, I was instructed to punch at Natalie's crest as she timed her punch to both deflect my punch and hit me with the same hand. I quickly realized that it didn't matter how much larger I was than Natalie, or

even how hard I threw that punch, because the technique ensured she didn't get hit. This realization of what the system has to offer is what got me hooked.

I make it a point to go to every class I can, no matter how I am feeling or how hard a day I have had, because I never leave a class unhappy. I have to remain so focused on the moment, feeling different sensations, coordinating my body to move the way I would like it to, and cooperating with my partner, that it becomes a sort of meditation. The rest of the world doesn't exist outside the kwoon during class.

We all struggle with the drills at the beginning of class, stepping with the wrong leg, or using a fist instead of an open hand. After two hours of class, suddenly it makes sense, it feels natural, and we're no longer focused on the first move we were given. Instead, we can focus on the progressions given to make the whole movement flow and become practical.

I was fortunate enough to be here for our Sigung, Walter Jakimczuk's, visit, which furthered my appreciation for the art. Not only is he extremely enthusiastic, great at explaining the concepts, and extremely friendly, but I also saw how incredibly skilled we can be as we age. It's a system we can keep with us for the rest of our lives, which furthers its value to learn.

I've been with the club for almost a year now and have learned that there's so much more to Ving Tsun, and to this club, than just self-defence. We encourage each other to improve and grow during every single class. There's always a round of hugs when a brother or sister attains their next sash. We hang out outside of the club, whether for a few drinks or a weekend camping trip. We become a family.

I'm leaving Victoria in under two weeks of writing this article, but the confidence, skills, and friendships I've acquired will always be with me. It's great to know that I'll always have my kung fu family here in Victoria.

- Dustin General, White Sash

Editor's Note: On behalf of the club, we wish Dustin the best of luck on his travels.

Congratulations to the following students on attaining their new respective sash levels during the last quarter:

Mario Salas (Red Sash)

Excellent work!



Mario Salas receiving his red sash



Helen Guilding training with Ontario kung fu family

Welcome to new students:

**Gabriel Minville
Derek Vroom
Tony Lee**

Special Events

- * June 2018: Club camping trip
- * June 2018: Book Club:
 "Ip Man: Portrait of a Kung Fu Master"
- * July 2018: Sifu and Si-mo visit Ontario kung fu family,
 accompanied by Helen Guilding

UPCOMING

- * October 2018: 6th Annual Kung Fu Sister's Retreat
- * October 2018: Book Club:
 selections from *The Wing Chun Compendium Vol. 1*
- * December 2018: Inaugural World Open Wing Chun
 Competition

Click or cut and paste the links below to see several videos from the club camping trip and recent classes:

- <https://www.facebook.com/WingChunYYJ/videos/1029812600521181/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/WingChunYYJ/videos/1050560315113076/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/WingChunYYJ/videos/1050554751780299/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/WingChunYYJ/videos/1050519805117127/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/WingChunYYJ/videos/1065736360262138/>



Sifu and Si-mo's second wedding in Ontario

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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, Sifu Jim Kragtwyk's talks on various aspects of the system and instructional videos.