
INSIGHT

Shaolin Kung Fu Studios Medford Kwoon Newsletter

Vol 4 Issue 2

June 2007

The Paradox of Sparring

By Shih Fu Mike Evans

I have had several students come to me with questions about why we spar and to what intensity should we take things. This very question highlights a great paradox on which masters of the Shaolin arts have meditating for centuries. How

can a system with roots in Buddhism, which demands pacifism, fosters compassion, and strives for perfection of character, teach one of the most effective

and enduring martial arts in the history of human warfare? To help answer this, two quotes spring to the forefront of my mind. First, Sun Tzu wrote, "It is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one; If you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle." This quote brings out the fact that, through training, we explore our strengths and weaknesses, allowing us to develop personal strategy based on the fact of who we are and what we are (or are not) capable of. By maximizing our strengths while being aware of our weaknesses, we can become more confident

in our abilities. By knowing that nobody can defeat us unless we allow it, by facing our ego and controlling it, we have no reason to fight to prove our ability. Therefore we are more able to live a peaceful life.



The second quote comes directly from the teachings of our system. It is known as the Fourth Principle, and it states that true peace comes from training for war yet choosing to live in love. This Principle builds on the previous quote by adding an active mental component. We must know what it is to be able to cause harm in order to understand how terrible it is. Once we understand the potential of our techniques, we develop a respect for them and, hopefully, refrain from ever employing them.

Very often this lesson is brought to light in the children's classes. Kids have very little concept of what martial arts techniques can do as they have fortunately never had to protect themselves by striking another human being. During sparring sessions, it is possible for playful practice to escalate to the point at which someone gets hurt. Usually this is the

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Testing

By Si Jie Andrea Minski

We recently conducted testing that has been ongoing for over two weeks now. When a student steps onto the middle of the floor and bows in for testing, they must be prepared to be pushed to their physical and mental limits. The higher the sash level, the more these limits are pushed. This stands for even our youngest students because especially at the age of four and five, they are learning their body mechanics and expanding their mental ability.

The mental and physical growth of a student is critical to advancing in our system. No matter how many moves and forms a student knows, they mean nothing if the student doesn't attempt to internalize them. It is with this internalizing of the moves that allows the physical and mental limits to be pushed on testing.

One way to constantly push these physical and mental abilities is to practice whenever you can. We understand that life gets in the way, but that is part of being Shaolin, making the time to do what needs to be done. The more a student practices, the faster the moves will become internalized and therefore their mental and physical limits and be pushed come testing.

So the next time we have a testing be prepared beforehand to be pushed to our limits, both mentally and physically.

Shaolin Paradox, cont.

very first time that both parties realize that they have this power, and a poignant lesson is learned. Very often during sparring, both children and adults will modify their techniques in order to make them less effective so as not to hurt their partners— even to the point of using ridiculous distortions of true techniques that would actually make them more prone to getting hurt!

So, such is the great paradox of the Shaolin arts: the conflict between compassionate pacifism and lethal efficiency. While KNOWING what you are capable of is perhaps the more important lesson (especially in our system), it is also imperative that the external expression of the internal conflict be as accurate as possible. We can modify our speed, power, and intent without modifying our technique too much. It is important to remember that just as the entire universe can be expressed in the Manifest Human Being, so must our manifest self strive to express the un-manifest mental, emotional, and spiritual selves.

To use techniques we know or suspect are ineffective in order to avoid hurting a brother is altruistic upon first view, but upon further inspection we can see that, because such action of the manifest denies the advancement of the un-manifest, it actually holds us

back in our advancement, which in the long run, presents the potential for greater injury to both ourselves and our Brethren. By refining our fighting technique to the point at which we know we are untouchable, we can then bring ourselves down to a level at which friendly sparring can occur which still demonstrates clean technique.

“...if you know your
enemys and know
yourself, you will not
be imperiled in a hun-
dred battles...”

☯ Sun Tzu ☯

As we progress to this point, more and more of the “battle” will happen in our minds. We will find ourselves sparring lightly on the outside, while our minds are racing (although in emptiness) with strategies, possibilities, and probabilities, much like setting up a quantum physics sparring session in which all possibilities have presented themselves in our minds; only when we chose ONE of all of those we know we COULD execute, does the probability wave collapse, and the chosen technique to become manifest. Because it is mental, it also allows for the fact that any of those other possibili-

ties could have manifested (and in fact did as we played the scenario out in our mind).

The greatest of contests between ancient Masters occurred either without any physical contact or with only the gentlest of touches. Because at a Master level one is aware of, and in fact one with, all of the techniques available, he need not manifest them, but only allow for their possibility for them to have an effect. For two Masters to meet in such a way, they need only establish a connection in the Astral for “battle” to take place. This, in a way, solves the paradox of the arts, as when such battle ensues, the only injury is to the illusory nature of the human mind, which then allows the “loser” to attain new insight. Very often, the loser of such battles would simply smile and thank the winner for the lesson.

However, to reach these levels, we must first strive to perfect our exoteric knowledge. We must throw every punch in such a manner that, if we wished, it would cause tremendous damage; all the while tempering that with the intent to do no harm to any living being. We must train in the ways of the Masters, remembering not to mimic what they have done, but rather to seek what they sought.

ABCD.... & H

In the kids' classes, we require the students to learn certain mnemonics as learning aids. Two of these are the 4 H's of interpersonal contact, and the ABCDs of self defense. The 4 H's represent the 4 circumstances under which it is okay to touch someone

else in class, and the ABCDs represent the four parts of any complete self defense technique. These principles may be applied in all phases of training and life outside the Guan:

H - Handshake (to greet someone)
H - Help (to provide assistance)

H - Hug (to show compassion)
H - High Five (to congratulate)

A - Attack (From the “bad guy”)
B - Block (Don't get hit)
C - Counter / Control (Stun factor)
D - Deter (make sure he doesn't come back for more)

Health Kick

Jogging your Memory *By Jennifer G. Galea MS RD*

A recent Consumer Reports article presented the latest research on keeping our minds sharp, especially as we age. As I read the article, I couldn't help but notice that each of the five areas discussed could be addressed by being actively involved in a Martial Arts program!

1. Reducing Stress. Exercise is well known for its ability to aid in the reduction of stress on mental, physical and chemical levels. Add to that the myriad of stress-reducing benefits of the Martial Arts in particular and you have a true stress buster.

2. Staying Connected. By this the authors meant staying connected socially with others. The social aspects of a group training class such as a Martial Arts class cannot be underestimated, not to mention Martial Arts classes are fun and engaging, helping you to commit to the long term benefits.



3. Feeding the Brain. Consuming a nutritionally-balanced diet is key to any Martial Arts program and to your overall healthy lifestyle. The recommendations for maintaining healthy brain function are much the same as for maintaining overall healthy body function: minimizing trans-fat intake, reducing saturated fat intake, and consuming more fish and other foods that contain healthy fats. Also, according to the 2005 daily dietary recommendations, we should be consuming at least thirteen servings of fruits and vegetables each day!

4. Staying Fit. Physical activity is the best known way of protecting your brain against aging. The recommendation here is the same as for general health and well-being: at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days. Martial Arts training incorporates daily exercise into your routine in a fun and exciting way, so you can stick to it.

5. Flexing Brain Muscles. Use it or lose it. The mental aspect of Martial Arts training provides this type of mental stimulation as you apply what you are learning, along with a great physical work-out.

Keep in mind that “aging” doesn't mean you're heading toward your 90s. Depending on your lifestyle, aging-related changes to your mind such as memory loss can begin as early as your 20s or 30s. So stay committed to your Martial Arts training. Your mind will thank you for it.

Around the Wu Guan

Classifieds

Massage Therapy — Tao of Massage (Laoshih Mark) 631-294-5261

Acupuncture — Therapeutic Alternatives (Don Carey-Shaw) 631-654-3438

Flute and Bassoon Lessons — (Sijie Andrea) Sijie@NotKarate.com

Web Design — (Paul D) GeosphereMusic@Aol.com

Fine Dining — Trio at the Holbrook Country Club (Kevin Stahl) www.TrioFineFood.com

Chiropractic — North Shore Alternative Health Center (Dr. Ronald Kaufmann) 631-209-0050

Sash Testing

Congratulations to all who have successfully completed their sash tests. The next testing will be held in mid-July. Keep an eye on the memo board at the school for further updates.

White Sash

Julianna N

Nathaniel T

Michael G

Devin K

White 2 (kids)

Joshua H

Shane N

Sean K

Yellow Sash

Mike L

Joshua S

Erik C

Kevin S

Julio C

Paul D

Green Sash

Andrea M

New on NotKarate.com:

The new website is up! Check out www.NotKarate.com to see what Paul has been working on for us. While there is still plenty more to come, here are some of the features that have already been added:

Cafepress - [In the Members Only section] Shaolin Kung Fu Studios clothing and gifts. Everything from aprons to mugs to t-shirts!

Reading List - [In the Members Only section] Recommended reading for students of all ages. In the near future, some of these titles will be assigned as required reading for various sash levels... get a head start now!

Get Your NotKarate Email Address - [In the Members Only section] Get a custom email address with the Not-Karate domain (For example: youname@NotKarate.com). There are two types available: a full web-based email account, or an auto-forwarding address which will forward all incoming mail to your existing email address. See Shihfu for further details.

SKFS Web Forum - [In the Members Only section] Chat, post , and meet members from all four schools in our new online forum. While the old Yahoo group will still remain active, this new venue provides for greater ease of use and better features. Remember, the more you participate, the more there is for everyone to enjoy.

Digital Insight - [In the Library] Along with all of the other content that is being posted in this area, you can find both the latest issue of INSIGHT, as well as back issues of INSIGHT and the retired Martial Arts messenger.