

The teachings of Shi De Yang

Walter Gjergja (Shi Xing Mi, Shaolin Disciple 32nd generation)

Grand Master Shi De Yang, 31st generation Shaolin monk, is unanimously considered among the greatest traditional Shaolin Master of recent generations, a real present-day exponent of Shaolin martial arts and Chan Buddhism.

Direct disciple of the late Shi Suxi, to whom he was like a son, Shi De Yang is one of very few Shaolin Masters of recent generations to have studied in a profound manner all 'three treasures of Shaolin' (Chan, Wugong, traditional medicine). This traditional knowledge, aptitude to studying and teaching, exceptional martial abilities and philosophical vision, have allowed him over the years to be chosen for some of the more prominent roles in the Temple, from head of the warrior monks to transcriber of the ancient texts, from philosophy teacher to director of traditional Wugong (Kung Fu WuShu) studies.

Books and documentaries have been made about him, however despite the international fame Shi De Yang continues to reside for most of the year in DengFeng, near Shaolin temple, absorbed in his studies and teaching.

To the activities at the Temple Shi De Yang has for some years added the management of his external school, which welcomes several hundred young students, often very poor, to whom he offers a study program that includes Chan, Wugong, as well as basic general culture subjects.

Most of all he has remained true to the Shaolin tradition, often shying away from the more glamorous or commercial opportunities to devote his time humbly to studying, and teaching, Shaolin Chan and Wugong to local students. His international travels are usually motivated by carefully screened invitations from trusted students, disciples, or Shaolin brothers, always maintaining a humble and modest approach in an era when Shaolin is too often presented in outlandish and "bombastic" way.

During one of my many stays in Shaolin I had the opportunity to meet Master Shi De Yang.

The Master initially accepted me as his school student, then as direct student, and finally, after years of study and friendship, as his formal Disciple, descendent of the 32nd Shaolin generation with the name Shi Xing Mi. The rare traditional ceremony, performed in the Shaolin temple with the presence of elder monks and relatives of the Master, has formalized the entry in the Shaolin genealogy and the creation of a very important bond, considered as that of family.

As his student and then disciple, during the past few years I have had the great honor of welcoming Master Shi De Yang at our school, named – by him – Shaolin Wuseng Houbeidui Italy.

Our invitations have been motivated by the desire for him to meet our students, to have his assistance in developing our traditional school program and teaching system, and to conduct fund-raising events aimed at supporting the improvement of his DengFeng (Shaolin) school.

Master De Yang has stayed with us in Italy several times, offering to everybody a rare and profound insight in traditional Shaolin martial arts and Chan philosophy.

In the daily lessons he often interrupted the intense physical training to discuss not just the technique or the application, but the origin and motives of what the students were doing, and every time Master De Yang was able to define a much broader meaning than a punch or a kick or a stance might suggest.

In this article I will outline some of the many thoughts and teachings that Master De Yang shared, avoiding descriptions of martial techniques to focus on the far more important broader concepts he repeatedly touched.

The following is a summary of insights in Shaolin philosophy: I hope they can be a source of inspiration for your daily martial arts practice, but more importantly for your daily life.

Shaolin martial arts begins with basics and ends with basics. At the start you will only do basics, because they are the foundations on which you will build all else, and at the end you will only do basics, because you will realize that all else is within them.

However your basics will no longer be basic, they will show skill of the highest level.

Endless practice is the path towards excellence, nothing more, nothing less. Nobody should fear thousands of techniques practiced a few days; everybody should fear the one technique practiced thousands of days. So don't try to know everything superficially, try to know a few things completely.

Of primary importance are the stances: they must be practiced tirelessly, to strengthen the core of the body, to understand balance and movement, do develop rooting and speed, to make joints and muscles supple and resistant.

Then we will add kicks, punches, blocks, and many types of defensive and offensive movements, combined firstly in sequences, the forms, and then also practiced and applied freely with a training partner.

This progression should be gradual, not rushed; to practice combat without technique will become a useless brawl. To practice technique without a strong body will become a useless flailing of limbs. First prepare the body, then the technique, then the application. And always prepare the mind.

To enable yourself to improve, together with the technique practice we must also train our bodies, using the techniques themselves but also through a rigorous program of exercises that will work our flexibility, endurance, strength, power. Neglecting this aspect of Shaolin training is neglecting to forge the weapon: we might learn how to use it, but it will be blunt and break easily.

Only through serious training you can achieve a high level, in martial arts and in everything else: there are no shortcuts, and if there seem to be they will inevitably lead to mediocrity or worse, to disaster.

So, even before you start training martial arts, teach yourself to be determined and hard working, in all you choose to do: this will already be an important lesson for your whole life, one that you should apply in everything you do, every day.

Traditional Shaolin Wugong must be practiced frequently, with patience and perseverance, training our body and mind to protect itself and those around us, from the outside dangers as well as those from within, such as disease. It was initially created primarily for health and total control of body and mind, then from this came the ability to defend oneself in fighting.

Times have changed, we fortunately might never have to face bandits, invading armies, dangerous living conditions, but perhaps modern society needs Shaolin Wugong more than ever, because it can offer something for everybody, from children to the elderly, to improve the health of body and mind.

Modern society fills our bodies and minds with many useless and sometimes negative things, and Shaolin Wugong can help eliminate them. People might become interested as a form of physical exercise, intensive and varied, or as a form of self defense, as even today we might need to protect oneself or those around us from aggression.

Today WuShu is also shown, sporting competitions, entertainment ... all this is good, a natural part of the evolution that has always been and always will be, dictated by the times and needs, however we must always remember where it all comes from. To make Shaolin WuShu suitable for our modern times is positive, but this should be done by adding new elements, not by replacing the old ones, which would mean the loss of Shaolin's traditions and its culture.

Shaolin Wugong today is something for all to enjoy and for all to benefit from, in China and in the whole world, in many different ways, from martial art to fitness to shows, however everybody must know that the real value of traditional Shaolin is not martial arts but what they are a part of: Chan.

Shaolin Wugong is just a branch of the tree that is Chan.

Chan is the first treasure of Shaolin, and Wugong is a beautiful jewel in this treasure, but alone it represents only a small part of the total value.

Chan is a philosophy, a path, towards learning about one's body and more importantly one's mind and spirit, because only by knowing we can master, and only by mastering we can let go and be at peace, with oneself, with those around us, with life. A peace that today is perhaps more difficult to find than before, because we have so many distractions around us, so many superficial things which absorb too much of our focus and energy.

Attachment brings suffering and today we attach ourselves to so many unimportant things, making them very important in our mind, making our serenity dependent upon them.

We are often like a glass full of water that is being agitated: the sediments will float everywhere, and thus the water will be murky. We must find a way to be still inside, to let the water that is our mind be calm, and only then all the sediments will slowly drop to the bottom, leaving the water clean.

This peace and harmony within oneself is what enables us to live a serene life, despite the inevitable problems, the 'ups' and 'downs', that life will present us with every day, because those problems will be understood simply as a natural part of life itself, to be confronted with calm resolve and not with erratic fear.

Harmony within oneself comes from nothing more than harmony of our mind and our body.

If our mind is not maintained at its best, if it is often tired, or disrupted, or easily affected by moods, depression, fears, we will not be in harmony.

If our body is not maintained at its best, if it is often tired, or weak, or unable to perform activities or to protect us from dangers, we will not be in harmony.

Shaolin Chan teaches us, on its most basic level, that to practice Chan is to work towards this harmony of mind and body. Wugong, breathing, meditation, philosophy ... all this is the path of Shaolin Chan.

The martial arts of Shaolin strengthen our body, enabling it to protect us and to perform whatever we ask of it, but they cannot be viewed alone: they are moving meditation, they are breathing, they are mental exercise, they are a stimulation of Qi, they are an integral part of Chan and without understanding this they can become a limited and limiting pursuit.

Shaolin Wugong is an integral part of Chan, and becomes of particular value to all of us in our present lives if we seek to follow the whole path, not just a small part of it. A little is undoubtedly better than nothing, but try always to search for more, for a deeper understanding, of what you do and ultimately of who you are.

We should seek Chan in everything we do, in every day, every action, every breath, for Chan is breathing and thinking and living, and nothing is simpler yet more complex.

Using the Shaolin disciplines you can strengthen your body inside and out, strengthen your mind and spirit, then through this strength you will banish fears and simply feel calm and peace and harmony, within yourself and thus with everyone around you.

We should seek in ourself maximum strength with deepest peace, great effort with unbound serenity, constant energy with total balance. We should seek to be the best possible person we can be, for us and for all others.

All these capacities are in us, in our mind and in our bodies, and we must utilize as best we can these beautiful temporary gifts we are given, always: in our Shaolin training, in school studies, at work, with our family and friends ... in our whole life.

Train hard and you will be better than you ever thought you could be, in martial arts and in everything else in life. Better as a person, better for yourself and for others.

Be righteous to yourself and to all those you meet, don't develop attachment for the unnecessary, don't harbor negativity but only positivity, stay strong and healthy in mind and body, enjoy life serenely whatever path it will present to you.

Amitufo.

For further information on Master Shi De Yang you can visit the websites:

www.shideyang.com

www.shaolindisciples.net
