

# SHAOLIN TEMPLE FIGHTING SKILLS



## EVOLUTION OF FIGHTING TECHNIQUES

**T**he Shaolin Temple in Henan province, China, was founded by a humble Indian Buddhist monk called Batuo around 495 BC. In 517 BC the Bodhidharma travelled from India to the Shaolin Temple, where he founded Ch'an Buddhism or what is more commonly known as Zen. The legend is that when he arrived at the temple, he discovered the monks were weak from practicing sitting meditation all day, so he conceived and taught them a series of internal and external exercises to increase their health, strength, and vitality. These later developed into what we now call **Shaolin Kung Fu and Shaolin Qi (Chi) Gong.**

Throughout the history of the temple, there has been a steady stream of monks bringing the best skills from the Asian world, combining them with ancient Shaolin skills, and then refining

these modified skills for optimal effectiveness. The Shaolin Temple Fighting techniques are not pages from a history book but are something that are as alive and relevant today as they were thousands of years ago. Bringing Shaolin martial arts to the West is another chapter in the Shaolin book, and as a 34th generation fighting disciple from the Shaolin Temple, I continue with this tradition today.

### THE ART OF WAR

In the Shaolin Temple, as well as studying the art of meditation and Qi Gong, we also study the art of war. Long before guns, tanks, and bombs were invented, Shaolin martial arts were used in war. The monks had to find ways to change their body from vulnerable flesh, blood, and sinew into powerful invincible

weapons. Not just their legs, arms, torso, and head, but also their internal organs, and most importantly their mind.

### MIND = HEART = MIND = HEART

The Chinese character for mind is the same as it is for heart. In China we do not split them into two like you do in the West. Wherever your heart is so your mind will be. It is your heart or mind, which makes your world, everything comes from it. So when you train in the fighting arts, you must practice your heart at the same time as you practice your body. You need to understand yourself and be brutally honest. What are you good at? Improve this skill. What are you no good at? If you think you are good at everything then you don't know yourself. Only when you

know your own strengths and weaknesses can you control yourself. Only when you know your own strengths and weaknesses can you then go on to study your opponent's strengths and weaknesses and ultimately control them. This is the way to win a fight. This is also the way to win a war. But in war we are fighting with an enemy, in martial arts we are fighting with our own ego and our own inner enemy. We come up against this enemy continually in our training - when we feel tired, impatient, lazy, or we lose faith in ourselves or what we are learning. We especially come up against this when we are a new student.

## BEGINNER'S MIND

The beginner's class is the most important level and one which we will keep coming back to all our martial art's life. We are about to build a house, we have a blueprint in our mind, but so this house doesn't come falling down, we need to have strong foundations.

In the Shaolin Temple, we get up every morning at five-thirty, and go for a run up the mountain. This is like putting money into a saving's account. If we do not have the stamina then we will not be able to practice the skill. When we come back from the mountain, we practice five basic stances, five basic kicks and stretching.

Learning martial arts is no different from learning maths or English, if we cannot add two plus two then we cannot progress to algebra, if we cannot read the alphabet then we can never read Shakespeare. This is the reason we study these very basic skills. Only when our body is getting stronger do we then start to learn some internal and external forms, and only when our master feels we are ready do we progress to studying fighting punches and kicks and then start to fight in the ring.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF QI

We also practice body conditioning. I specialise in Shaolin Steel Jacket. The reason I specialise in Shaolin Steel Jacket is because I am small – not much taller than 5ft 6 – so when I fight, I have to go into my opponent, and they are



nearly always taller and heavier than me, which - without my body conditioning skill - would give them an advantage over me.

I know it is difficult for many Western people to believe in Qi. Science still has not found a way to prove or disprove it. Excluding the Western understanding of the bodies anatomical system such as the nervous and respiratory system, within the human body there are a network of pathways which we call meridians, they carry Qi through out the body. They are like small rivers which when the body becomes stressed or ill become blocked. The Chinese believe in preventing illness rather than waiting for it to happen so we practice Qi Gong to keep a healthy flow of Qi running through our bodies. Sometimes I think we look after our cars, better than we look after ourselves. We don't wait for it to break down before we give it gasoline, water, oil, or take it to the garage for a check up, so why do so many of us do that with our bodies?

## BODY CONDITIONING

If we only want to keep healthy, then we will continue to practice healthy forms of Qi Gong all our lives, but if we want to be fighters then we learn to master the Qi and direct it into different parts of our body. The analogy I use is to compare it with the wheels on a car, they are useless without Qi – air – but by pumping simple air into its tyres the car is trans-

formed from a vehicle with a powerful engine that can go nowhere to a vehicle with a powerful engine that can go everywhere.

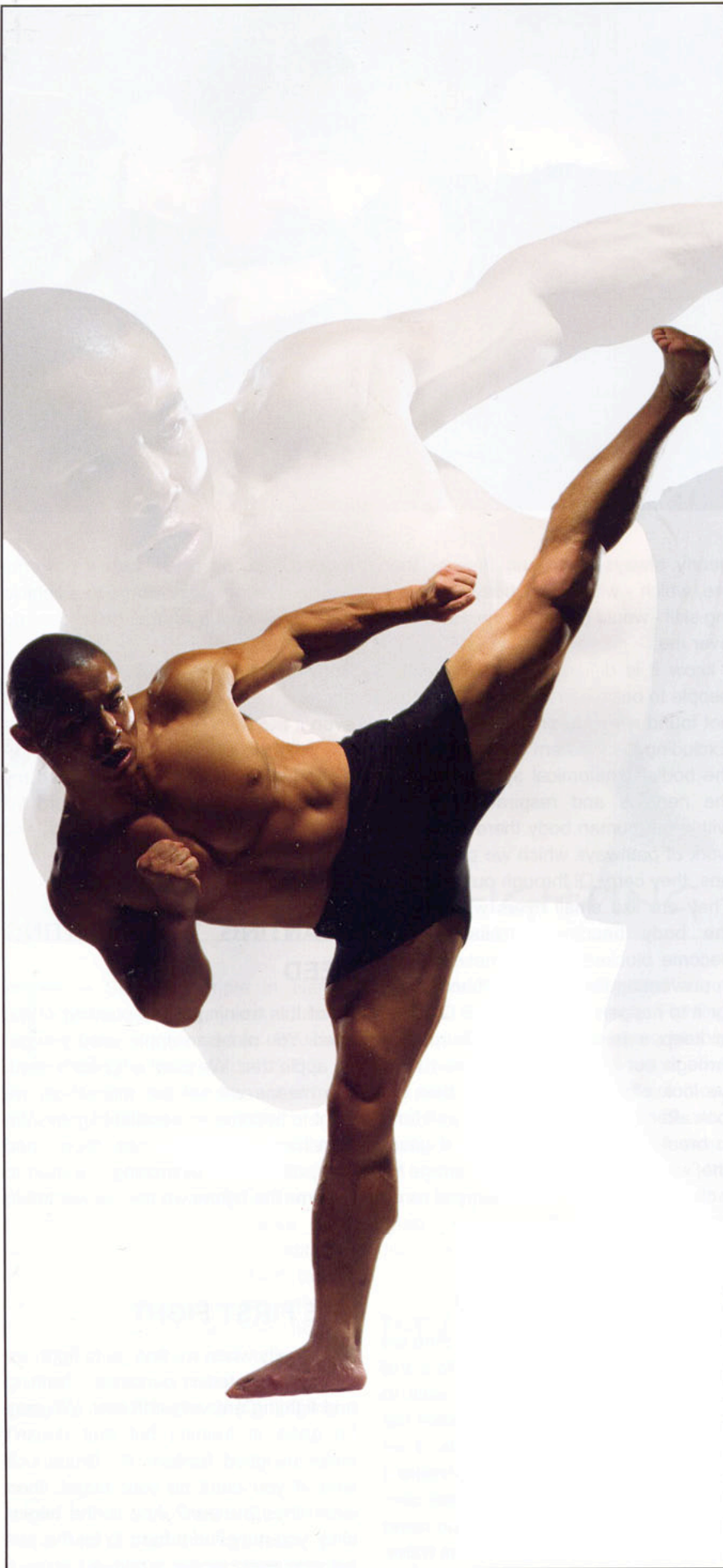
Body conditioning gives us the confidence to come up against our opponent even if he looks bigger or stronger than us. With the Shaolin Steel jacket technique I put my Qi into my back and my torso and then I am confident that I will be protected from blows. My back and torso is like steel. It is my armour.

## PLANTING THE FIGHTING SEED

All of this training is the planting of the seed. You plant an apple seed you get an apple tree. We plant a fighter's seed, this means we set our motivation; we want to become an excellent fighter. We train hard - this is the cultivation - and then, after years of training, we start to become the fighter we always wanted to be.

## THE FIRST FIGHT

But usually when we first go to fight, we are disappointed in ourselves. Training and fighting are very different. We may be good at training but that doesn't make us good fighters. As Bruce Lee said, if you can't hit your target, then what does it mean? And in the beginning, you may find it hard to hit this target who is no longer a pad, a bag or a



fellow sparring partner but a determined fighter who wants to win as much as you.

Nothing can prepare you for your first fight. But if you have trained consistently then you will know you are strong. You know you did everything to be the best. Doesn't mean you will win but you will have the confidence to win. If you don't have confidence then you can never win.

## ARE THE SHAOLIN FIGHTING SKILLS FOR YOU?

We all want to win. It feels good. But we must remember it is just a stopping point on the way, it is not our ultimate destination. And the Shaolin fighting skills are not a dream, and they are not a film, they are a life. So ask yourself, do you love the Shaolin Martial Arts? If you do then you must continue to train. Through hard training you will begin to understand that you are much more than you thought, through Qi Gong you will have health and energy, and through meditation you will develop control over your mind. You will ultimately win the war over your ego. This is the highest martial arts of all, and one, which may take you many lifetimes to achieve.

Shifu Yan Lei is a 34th generation fighting disciple from the Shaolin Temple in China. He specialises in Shaolin Steel Jacket, Bone Marrow Cleansing Qi Gong, Sanshou Fighting, and other forms of Shaolin Gong Fu. He teaches private lessons in the London and Brighton area. He has produced a series of teaching DVD's, one of which 'Shaolin Warrior: Kung Fu Journey' was a top twenty martial arts bestseller on Amazon.

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