



Shen Chuan Review

"Hit hard...Hit fast...Go to the House!"

"A real fight is one that you cannot afford to lose". -Shihan Paul Britt

NOTABLE MENTION

Professor Lansdale told me to check out this book, "Mission Road" by Rick Riordan from San Antonio. It's got a cool mention of Shen Chuan. So I give the book a quick read, and sure enough on page 118, about half way down you'll find the following:

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"What was that martial arts style you used on me earlier, anyway?" I asked her.

"Shen Chuan."

Ralph and I exchanged looks.

"Hell," I said.

As far as I knew, Shen Chuan was the only native Texas martial arts system. It was also a damn hard style to defend against. It is taught in the East Texas piney woods by one extremely good, extremely unconventional Sensei.

"You study with Lansdale?" I asked.

"*Did,*" Madeleine corrected. "He kicked me out of the dojo. Said I was over-the-top."

I'm trying to imagine what Joe Lansdale would consider over-the-top. Chain saws and atom bombs maybe.

I'm with him. If it's over the top for Professor, you better put that dog down. It's a foamin' at the mouth killer.

Pretty cool.

A REAL FIGHT...BY SHIHAN PAUL BRITT

Most people have never been in a real fight. Sure they have been in a fight as a kid, or in East Texas fighting their drunk relative at a holiday party because the Cowboys lost. That is not necessarily a bad thing. It means that they have most likely done the right things in their life, not placed themselves in a position that they would be in danger.

What is a real fight like? A real fight is one that you cannot afford to lose. It is the fight that happens on the side road at 4 am. It is the person breaking into your house and wanting to harm you or yours. The real fight is the female being grabbed off the street by a serial rapist. A real fight is a fight for your life. The real fight is ugly. It is a fight that you do not want to be in, but once you are there you cannot quit, you cannot lose. It is not about winning, at its dark heart it is about survival and nothing else.

What is a real fight like? A real fight is scary. You are in the fight for your life and you know it. It causes you to see and feel everything in a different way. The chemicals that your body produces cause you to see and hear things in a way that throws you off your mental and emotional responses. Without getting into the scientific reasons of why this occurs, I would rather tell you what I have learned through the hard road called experience.

As a Police Officer and a Soldier, I have been in a few situations that were real fights. I have faced people that wanted to do me or others real harm or death. I am not saying this as a boast; it is where my experience and knowledge was earned.

I faced a man one night on the side of the road that was intent on killing anyone that stood in his way of freedom. This person had kidnapped, raped and was trying to kill a young girl. When I found them, he made the decision to fight as soon as he saw me. His decision was made well before I realized that there was a problem. I was not thinking that there was about to be a fight, I was complacent and looking at the contact as a routine "drunk." There were warning signs that this was more than it seemed, but they were easy to see in retrospect. I was behind the curve as soon as I stepped out of my car. This unfortunately is where the average person is also when attacked. The way to overcome this is through realistic training. You have to be able to accelerate to the same level the other person is at "mach one."

I went to grab the bad guy at which time, I knew that I was in for a fight. Grabbing him was like grabbing a live electrical wire. Just from the tactile sensitivity of touching many different people, I knew that the battle was on as I threw him into my Patrol Car. I drew my weapon and told the man to get on the ground and he lunged forward. At that time I struck him with my pistol to keep him from getting it. That is when I began to experience what adrenaline does to your body and mind.

I experienced a major adrenalin rush. It was 4:13am, but I was able see the bad guy as if it was broad daylight. At the same time, I had tunnel vision and only saw him. I could see everything about this guy; I later gave a perfect description of what he looked like and what he had on. I was focused on this person and the fight that I was in.

I began to operate on two different levels. I was thinking about what I had to do. I knew that my weapon was down and I was not able to secure it in my holster. I knew that I could not take the fight to the ground. At the same time, I know that we were kicking, hitting and tearing into each other, but I was on autopilot about what strikes I was doing. There was no conscious thought of what I was doing. It was just happening. That is a good thing in a real fight. You want your training to instill those tools in your arsenal so that they are used without thought. Bruce Lee called this "No Mind." It is indicative of your level of training and how realistic your training has been in that you are able to use your tool and tactics without a "lag" time. The computer knows what to do because you have hard wired appropriate responses into the system.

After the fight, several rings that the bad guy wore were found on the ground. It appeared that I had been doing finger locks on him at some point in the fight and pulled the rings off. I do not remember doing them however. Occasionally I was able to see openings and attacked them. I saw an opening and I kicked the bad

A REAL FIGHT ... (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2)

in the groin and lifted him off the ground. It did not phase him, but it did put a chink in my mental armor. I could not fathom a groin kick not working at that time in my growth as a fighter. I made the conscious decision not to use a hip throw after ending up in that position without thinking about it. I knew that if I executed the throw, I would lose my weapon as it was not secure in my holster.

Because it was dark, I needed my vision more than my hearing. I could hear us yelling at each other, but I could not hear anything else. After about four minutes, my back up arrived. I never heard them say anything. I was too focused on the threat. As the fight continued, I felt myself becoming exhausted. I finally started to feel the blows as they landed. I knew when I was cut by a punch as I felt the blood start to run down my face and into my eyes and mouth. I actually thought that I had quit fighting when I was cut, but my backup told me that I never quit. I was still functioning on autopilot. My fear increased exponentially at this time, but I was out of the adrenalin rush that began almost six minutes earlier. I found that I was in danger of failing in a real fight. I made the conscious decision that I was not going to fail and that I was not going to die on the side of the road. I was out of gas, bleeding and hurt. This is the time in the real fight that you make decisions that you should have made the day you walked into a martial arts class. What level of violence am I willing to go to so that I will go home to my wife and family? That is a decision that everyone has to make on their own. I cannot tell you what point you are willing to go to. I know mine, now. I made the decision that I will do whatever I have to do to continue on my path. It was a little late in the game, but fortunately not too late.

As I was closing with him for what I had decided was the final time, my Sgt. arrived on scene. The bad guy decided to run at that time as he was outnumbered. He was later captured and was sentenced to life in prison. The young lady that was assaulted graduated from High School and has married. She was the real hero as she refused to give up and die during her assault.

The real fight was hard. It was exhausting and bloody. I immediately began to feel every place that I had been struck after it was over. I was nauseated from the backlash of the adrenalin dump. I felt like a failure. I had not been able to put the handcuffs on my arrest. I helped search for the suspect for two hours before being relieved by the day shift. This helped compound my exhaustion, but when I got home I was unable to sleep until midnight the day of the fight.

The real fight continues after the physical part is over. Whether you are a citizen, soldier or cop, you will be second guessed by everyone, including yourself. You might end up with PTSD, where the fight affects you psychologically long after the fight. It can even destroy you, if you let it. If it does you have to find someone to talk to about it. This is the subtle killer that most martial arts/self defense schools do not talk about. The real fight is not fun, it is not pretty.

Do not lose the real fight either before, during or after it is over. You cannot afford to lose something as precious as your life. Do not let the bad guys win.

SHEN CHUAN HISTORY: LATEST INSTALLMENT

Continuing our installments of Shen Chuan history book submissions, we will include an excerpt from Sensei Chad Curry. One of the Tres Amigos who came behind Professor Coy and Professor Eugene, which included himself, Shihan Paul Britt, Shihan Billy Jack Worsham and later Sensei Ryan DeWitt.

The first time I heard of Joe Lansdale, I was in a Tae Kwon Do class at Stephen F. Austin State University. As a kid I had been interested in martial arts, but I was taking this class just to fulfill the physical education requirements of the university. During these classes, other students and a variety of folks from the community would come and work out with us. One of these was Chad Francois. After class one day, I heard him talking about a guy that taught martial arts that was practical, brutal, and free of katas. The Tae Kwon Do class was primarily stretching and simple kata practice, which I felt was somewhat silly and at the least would require a huge amount of time to actually learn anything worth knowing.

SHEN CHUAN HISTORY... (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

Anyway, I got the meeting place and time from Chad Francois. So, in a day or two, I dropped by the old fire station down by the creek to check out Matsukaze Budo, as the system was known at the time. My impression during the workout (they let me participate on day one, by the way) was that these guys were the real deal. There were two arenas inside the stifling hot room. One was led by Terry Thoburn and the other by Joe Lansdale. Thoburn's side seemed to be more aikido oriented, with dramatic throws that seemed to require little effort on his part. He spent a lot of time that night and during subsequent workouts explaining the role of inner energy or chi and demonstrating little 'tricks'. Often, I thought many of these tricks were merely that, a trick, and sometimes Thoburn would have a hard time making them work on me and others. When he taught aikido techniques that used momentum and mechanics, however, there was no doubt in my mind that it was real. I have distinct memories of being stretched out horizontally at least 4 feet (seemed like 8' when I landed) off the ground and rapidly approaching the mat. I liked him fine and thought that he knew his stuff, but I never did buy into the quasi mystic aspects that he talked about. To this day I have a desire to learn more aikido.

Joe's side of the room was quite different. There seemed to be a constant blur of movements that ended in a sudden fall to the mat or a yelp or gasp of pain as a joint was encouraged to bend in an unnatural way, followed by serious tapping on the mat or anything handy. The tapping rarely resulted in an immediate easing of pain, by the way. I laugh as I say that, remembering the painful "lag-time" before the actual release. He seemed to rely less on 'chi' and more on plain ol' brutal efficiency. Strikes and techniques to a casual observer almost looked sloppy or haphazard compared to what I had seen in Tae Kwon Do. But as I continued to come and learn, I saw that efficiency and effectiveness were the goals and not aesthetics.

I don't remember how long I was there before Joe and Thoburn split the sheet. I do remember that I was a brown belt in rank. I wasn't privy to the circumstances surrounding it and frankly wasn't interested in knowing. It seems like I laid out for a couple of weeks, maybe longer, while it was all sorted out. I remember Thoburn telling me in the grocery store where we bumped into each other that he would quickly promote me to black belt if I came with him. That sounded a little off so I never acted on the offer.

Everything resumed once Joe (referred to hereafter as Professor) opened up at the current location on the loop. The workouts were hard, intense, and my pain threshold was expanded beyond belief. But the friendships and camaraderie made it enjoyable. There just seems to be a certain bond between guys that experience pain and gain together. There were three of us that came through and kinda stayed together through the ranks - Billy Jack Worsham, Paul Britt, and myself. Ryan DeWitt came a little later but quickly caught up to us. (It was almost irritating at the time to see how talented he was and how quickly he caught on.) All three have since gone on to earn multiple ranks and become extremely proficient. Then there was Coy Harry and Eugene Frizzell. Those two were the original of Professor's protégés. They were always two or three jumps ahead of the four of us and gave us the one-on-one attention that allowed us to progress much faster than would have been typical at an average dojo.

One thing that I want to be sure and mention. I was always proud of the professionalism of these guys. To have as much pain meted out every time we met and never have a loss of temper, or hurt feelings, or steams of profanity flying around the room says a lot about the Professor and the students. We had great fun, ribbed each other, laughed through the pain, and *learned*. For that I'm thankful.

There was a great sense of accomplishment when that black belt was awarded to me. I consider my time at the Professors dojo as time well spent. Hopefully one day soon circumstances will permit me to pick up where I left off. There was always a friendly competition between us four and it's bugging me that I'm so far behind now. One day... It's still in the blood...

Thanks Professor Joe.

INDICATORS TO SAVE YOUR LIFE...BY SHIHAN BILLY JACK WORSHAM

Reading Shihan Britt's article for this edition got the old cobwebs in my memory cranked up. Reading his introduction into the main point, something jumped off the page at me that I've tried hard to instill in my own children, and our students when given the opportunity. And that would be indicators. The little creepy crawlies that make hairs tingle on our necks and the little voice that nags at us when something isn't the way it should be. Well, maybe I'm the only one with the little voice... But the point is that we know when something is wrong. Whether we listen to those feelings or not could mean the difference between a major situation or nothing at all.

"If I tell you to get down on the floor, you three better race to see who gets there first. Or you'll have me to answer to."

Those words were instilled in me, long before I knew how old I was. Three siblings staring up at their dad, wondering "What tha'?..."

We all slunk low in the seat, getting a head start, because that was his "meant business" voice and there was no arguing with that.

I don't remember all of the details, but something was transpiring outside of our car and my father had the cognitive sense to warn us long before it took place. We were pulling away when whatever he feared did indeed take place. We sped to the next intersection, where he saw one of his fellow officers and flagged him down. He told him something, and the guy sped off, lights flashing and siren wailing.

Most who know me on a personal level know that my dad is a Justice of the Peace, and before that was a deputy Sheriff for many years. Nacogdoches was a sleepy little town, where not much happened if you didn't know any better. I grew up knowing better, and seeing the seedier side of life in a small town.

"You kids did good", came the reassuring tone from my dad. "Always remember, that if I tell you to get down, no matter where we are, no matter who's around, you do it without hesitation. And stay there till told different".

"Yes sir" answered the young trio in unison.

Later I asked my dad, being the oldest, what that had been about, with the plan to relay it all to my little brother and sister. He told me there was a man who was acting strangely and dad was pretty sure he was "up to no good" as he would always say. He told me how he looked, where his hands were, what his "eyes said" and what his body language was saying.

My daddy is a superman I thought. He looked at that guy and knew exactly what would happen. That's dang near ESP in my book.

But what I had been introduced to that day was what he called "readin' people". Looking at all of the "indicators" a person gives off and deciphering them. This intrigued me early on and it is something I tried very hard to learn from him as I grew up.

So, to break it down to just the nuts and bolts the average person needs to survive, my advice is always "if it doesn't feel right, then it is NOT RIGHT." Listen to those feelings. You have grown up learning how people act and interact with others. There are certain behavioral principles we all adhere to. When someone is out of that realm, they will display what I call negative indicators.

A glaring example of a negative dress indicator would be someone wearing a trench coat on one of our 100 degree days. Either he belongs to the local theatrical club and is in costume, or he's "up to no good". The dress, for that kind of weather, is obviously out of character.

Not so obvious is an example in the group I call negative position indicators. This is where the body is out of normal position, any part of it, compared to how most people hold their bodies. An example of a negative position indicator is what I call the missing hand.

When most of us stand with our hands on our hips, male or female, our hand or thumbs are visible. If a

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person stands with their palms directly on the hips, the four fingers are visible to the front of the body wrapping the hip bone while the thumb gently disappears behind the back. If a person stands with their palms on their sides the thumb is visibly pointing forward around the hip while the four fingers gently disappear around the back to the kidney area.

What keys me up is if most of the hand is NOT visible. Thumb partially visible but pointing down, or not visible at all. Fingers completely concealed. These are indicators that the hand is being used to grasp something. A knife or gun comes to mind.

When encountering someone in a confrontational manner, some indicators of aggression can be clenched fists, gritting the teeth, pursed lips and jaw muscles tightening, nose flaring, eyebrows frowned, profuse sweating or extreme reddening on the face and ears. Heavy or sporadic breathing may also accompany any of the above indicators.

Lack of eye contact, accompanied by other indicators may foreshadow aggressive behavior. As an example, a friend and I were sitting outside a store waiting for another friend to show up. We had been there for awhile because the third friend was late as usual. A man walked around the corner of the store, from behind it in which a run-down apartment complex housed some known drug users. He stopped at the corner and surveyed the entire parking lot. It looked strange, but he could have been looking for someone as well. There were some vending and ice machines lining the front of the store area. The sun was setting and the outside lights came on. One of the lights did not come on, and made a dim little hole between two machines. The man walked over to that little hole, looked around again, and melted into it. He was still visible, but not much.

We witnessed him “eyeing” several store customers. He would glance at them and quickly look away. I told my friend, he is sizing up a target. My friend said “no way, not here”. I said “look at him. He’s wearing a jacket (it was around 80 degrees), smoking with one hand and the other hand is inside the jacket and he is leaning against the wall in a dimly lit hole sizing people up as they pass”. My friend thought I was crazy.

Then this young girl drove up and got out of her car to his right. She would have to pass in front of him to get to the door of the store. She proceeded down the walk and then she saw him. Startled, breaking eye contact and visibly nervous she CONTINUED TOWARDS HIM. She had no sooner passed him when he jumped toward her and grabbed her. Instinctively I reached for a shotgun in my gun rack and stepped out. As I hit the pavement, two undercover cops pounced on the guy from nowhere. They materialized from thin air. I never knew they were anywhere around. I quickly threw my shotgun in the floorboard and jumped back into the truck. I looked at my friend and he was wide eyed and his jaw was dragging the floorboard.

“Told ya,” I said.

“Uh... yeah,” was all I got in return.

When that girl stepped out of her car, everything in her being told her something was not right. We could see she was sensing it from a distance. Yet she ignored all the little indicators that were telling her to stop and go somewhere else. Luckily she was not the least bit hurt. In fact we watched in amusement as she kicked him and spit on him a couple of times while he was cuffed on the ground.

I tend to look at indicators in threat levels. One should be enough to get your attention. The guy in the previous scenario had a jacket on in 80 degree weather. That would cause me pause, but maybe not alarm the way people dress these days. Fashion and trends are important.

Now the fact that he was backed into a dimly lit hole, along with being dressed that way would have done it for me. Then adding the fact that one hand was crossed, not in front of him, but within the jacket would have sent me backpedaling. As it should anyone. As I said earlier, LISTEN to those little voices that tell you it’s not right. Those hairs stand up on your neck for a reason. They pull on the motor neurons in your brain that tell those feet to get moving, in the opposite direction. Really. It’s scientific fact.

INDICATORS... (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

Many around here watched the news in horror when the young woman was abducted from an area Wal-Mart not too long ago. That girl knew it was coming. She made her move, but it was too late. Would things have turned out different had she more time. Put more distance between her and her abductor. Seen and felt the indicators and not gone into the parking lot alone at all. We will never know and it is futile to speculate. But seeing it on the news drove home something that I always tell the wife and kids. Be aware. Be aware of your surroundings. Be aware of who is within reach.

Be aware of groups of people who display the pack mentality when loitering about. Alone they may be harmless. But together, and showing aggressiveness is a dangerous concoction best avoided. Take the time to get where you are going by moving well away from them, and not drawing their attention.

My oldest daughter had asked "Just what is being aware?" The simplest answer is knowing who and what is around you.

If you see things that are not right, avoid them. I'm not saying that we should walk around paranoid and jumping at shadows, but rather using our greatest asset that lies between our ears.

THE FOUR FISTS' OF SHEN CHUAN...BY PROFESSOR COY HARRY

Professor Lansdale has designed Shen Chuan in a very specific way to follow the maturation of the human being. The four fists in the title refer to the changes in the art as you progress from white belt to the higher ranks. The fists are as follows Hard, Hard-Soft, Soft-Hard and Soft.

By no means is it a requirement to learn and utilize all four Fists of Shen Chuan, they are merely presented so that students will be aware and have goals to reach. Also, it is important to mention that one Fist is not better than or more effective than another, just different. As the human beings differ from one another in varying degrees so do the Fists of Shen Chuan. Young people are not better than middle aged or elderly people, just different. It would be absurd to try to qualify one person as better than another when so many factors influence the growth and development of the individual. Human nature is to qualify and quantify but that doesn't make the qualifications or quantifications true. The purpose of this seemingly judgmental action is to give humans a reference point to gage their place in the universe.

That is what I am attempting to do with this work, give a reference point for Shen Chuan students. When you know where you are it is easier to get to another place if you want or need to. People as a whole tend to fear change; this fear is more of the unknown than that of the change itself. A map helps to alleviate the fear of the unknown, but someone had to go there first to be able to draw the map. That is what Professor Lansdale has done for us in Shen Chuan. He is not the only mapmaker, he is however a master mapmaker and we are fortunate to have his guidance.

The depths of Shen Chuan and other martial arts are potentially infinite. Some people understand martial arts on a very shallow level, it doesn't mean that they are shallow people, just that they haven't the experience or the will to delve into deeper understanding. Sometimes it is out of fear of what they might find. When you strive to reach the highest levels of martial arts you must take a journey of self disclosure and self discovery.

The higher physical levels of Shen Chuan, as in all other arts, can be reached in time by the practitioner getting older and losing their youthful vigor. As your body ages it becomes more important to relax and use less muscle. This is why there are soft levels of martial arts, some call them internal arts as opposed to the hard external systems most people are familiar with. There is an ongoing debate as to which style internal or external is the best at self defense. I believe this debate to be absurd because there is no way to qualify one as better than the other. Soft internal arts are very powerful when they are practiced with the right understanding of the art itself. An example of this is that some people train in soft systems such as Tai Chi for health reasons and have no idea that it is a very powerful self defense system. Others who practice soft

THE FOUR FISTS' OF SHEN CHUAN...(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7)

systems do so to be able to train without great physical exertion or pain. These people will after many years of diligent practice be able to use their art effectively for self defense. I will say that an individual is able to learn to defend themselves faster from a hard style than a soft. The interesting thing to note about hard styles is as a practitioner gets older their expression of that hard style becomes softer.

Shen Chuan gives the opportunity for the student to study every gambit of martial arts from external to internal. The individual student must make the choice as to when to move from the hard to the soft, or if they even want to. The system is designed to fit the student, not the student fit the system. This is where Shen Chuan makes the break from many other styles of martial arts. The freedom of choice does not mean that a student can violate the concepts and principles of Shen Chuan, only that they may express those differently from others within the system. The encouragement of self expression is vital to the soul of Shen Chuan. We feel it is a positive when students go and study other arts, because they can add to their expression of Shen Chuan and therefore Shen Chuan is strengthened.

Hard Fist

Shen Chuan is self defense from the moment a person walks through the door. Our job as instructors is to see that every student becomes proficient in the art of self defense. When a person first comes into Shen Chuan they are beginning the study of a hard style of martial arts. The definition of a hard style is that the techniques require the person to use more of their muscles and less finesse. The purpose of this is that it allows an individual to become fairly proficient at self defense in a relatively short period of time without high levels of body coordination. The reason it is successful is because most people coming to the system are indoctrinated in the false idea that strength is power. Most people believe that in order to control someone you must dominate them, which is an example of youthful thinking. Remember when we were younger we were taught that to be successful in sports we must be stronger, faster and more aggressive than our opponent. This indoctrination begins at an early age and we can't help but understand it because we were young, strong and invincible. This belief is what allows someone to defend themselves with a minimum of training. Shen Chuan takes this idea and adds some technique. You must also understand that as Shen Chuan as an art has four Fists, each Fist also has levels.

An example of the first level of the Hard Fist is a jab. When a beginner is taught the jab we focus more on teaching the proper body alignment and use the persons "strength is power" attitude. This quickly shows a person that they can increase their jab's effectiveness with proper technique. People still have the idea that to hit hard, even with proper body alignment, they need to use muscle, so they tighten their whole arm, shoulder and fist from the beginning of the jab to the end. This is the hardest of the ingrained ideas to overcome, so we use that in the beginning and later on begin to show a different side of power. Joint locks are taught much the same way, in that technique is more emphasized than other higher level concepts so as not to overwhelm the beginner. It is very difficult for someone to come into Shen Chuan and begin learning the entire list of concepts and principles along with the techniques. So we utilize and improve on the youthful thinking to help the beginner.

In the Yellow Belt with Stripe set, which is first real set of self defense techniques learned by a beginner, the aggression in the overwhelming of your opponent with strikes and entering the attack off line is immediately evident. Again, this is not hard to learn since it follows the youthful thinking of domination with strength and aggressiveness.

I consider the first level of the Hard Fist a very basic understanding of self defense, martial arts and even the Self. Hard Fist first level should be mastered when a student reaches the rank of Purple Belt. By then, exposure to higher level concepts should encourage the move up to the next level within the Hard Fist.

THE FOUR FISTS' OF SHEN CHUAN...(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8)

The second level within the Hard Fist is when the student begins to learn more control of their body. This allows them to relax a little and begin to flow. Their techniques are more fluid and less robotic. The strikes are faster and more accurate. The locks are entered and executed with more skill. An example of the second level of Hard Fist is again the jab. The student no longer tightens their whole body to fire the jab. The body and arm are relaxed, the hips and feet begin the punch. The only thing that is tense is the fist. Since the student's body is relaxed, the jab fires out much faster than before and will connect with more force, making the strike more powerful. Another advantage of the level of relaxation gained by the student is the ability to begin to coordinate upper and lower body motions. This allows the student to begin work on the higher level concepts and principles of the Hard Fist.

When the student reaches the Brown belt ranks they are in the third level of Hard Fist. This level is when the student begins to be able flow from striking to locking relatively easy. They are also beginning to be very good at spontaneous defense. Their fear of being hit begins to lessen and they are very competent martial artists. I would put our Brown belts against many Black belts in other systems when it comes to self defense. Basically the third level of Hard Fist is a refinement of levels one and two.

The third level Hard Fist is not the Hard-Soft fist, it is however a preview. The third level Hard Fist will take a typical student up to first degree Black Belt. I say typical student because some will move into the Hard-Soft fist earlier and some later. Another reason many people can't make the transition into the Hard-Soft Fist at this level is that they are close to making Black Belt. They tend to focus on the material for Black Belt and lose sight of anything deeper than reaching the "Holy Grail". Most people don't understand that a Black Belt is similar to High School degree. Yeah, it's a worthy accomplishment and one to be proud of, but you still have undergraduate and graduate work ahead. That is where the real learning takes place. When a student learns the art for the sake of self-improvement and not to gain status, they are able to make the transition into the other Fists before their time.

The problem with the Hard Fist is that it is designed for youth, as you get older it is difficult to sustain the use of strength in an engagement. The other Fists are designed to take up the slack of aging. The unique thing is that the other Fists are more powerful than Hard, and my wish is to see them incorporated earlier in the system by capable students. The Hard Fist is also somewhat dangerous to the individual using it since the aggressiveness in it can bleed over into their lives and cause unnecessary tension and stress. I know that sounds weird, but if you don't have the proper mentality and self knowledge, it can and will affect your personal life. You have no doubt seen adults who cannot mature out of youthful thinking, they are generally not the kind of people who others like to be around.

Concepts and Principles of the Hard Fist

In order to be proficient in the Hard Fist of Shen Chuan the student needs to have a complete understanding of the concepts and principles of this system. These concepts and principles are not solely for the Hard Fist. They are the ones that are the most important for beginners to focus on in the first few years of training that will allow them to develop a good foundation.

Hard Fist First Level

1. Natural Stance/Mobility and Stability- This means that traditional stances are not a specific part of Shen Chuan. You should use common sense so as not to have your feet too close together or too far apart. You should have your knees bent slightly so you can move quickly in any direction. The best way to learn this is to watch the instructors' feet, and not just their hands.

THE FOUR FISTS' OF SHEN CHUAN...(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

2. Hands in the safety zone- Your hands should always be in a position to respond to what an attacker could do. A good rule of thumb is to keep your hands in a “window” around your head, NOT by your side. If you can do this before an engagement, such as having your hands up in a non-threatening manner, it will give you precious time to respond.

3. Power side out- If you posture before or during an engagement, have your power side out front. Right handed people lead with the right, vice versa for lefties. The purpose of this is to have your strongest tool in a position to be used most effectively and efficiently.

4. Maintain pressure and pain/Take away space- The best way to explain this is to use the old saying “the best defense is a good offense”. In other words the more striking and locking you do, the more defending the opponent will have to do. As for taking away space, you should enter and back the person up because it is very hard to fight up close or backing up.

5. Intestinal fortitude- “You gotta have guts.” In a fight you are going to get hit, don't let that bother you. Train hard in class, and in a fight when you get hit you can minimize or even ignore it. Most importantly don't quit, this could cost you your life or the lives of others. This concept is something that some people have naturally, and some need to learn. If you don't have it, you will by staying in Shen Chuan.

6. Prefer warm zone to hot zone- The hot zone is in front of your opponent, and sometimes you have no choice but to be there. That position is where number five comes into play. If you can, you need to get to the outside of the opponent. This cuts down the options for them and increases your chances for victory. By the way, there is no cold zone in a fight.

7. Economy of motion- This is done by using proper technique. Don't let your elbow drift up when striking, don't cock your limbs for a strike, move in a linear fashion. This concept not only helps to make you faster, it keeps you from wasting energy. A good rule of thumb is if the motion is not vital to the technique, don't do it.

8. Surprise- Don't let the attacker know what you plan to do until it is too late. Also you must attack when they expect you not too. Sometimes this means attacking first, so you must let the situation decide the best use of this principle.

9. Distraction or Destruction- You must distract a person from what they are doing in order to carry out an effective technique. This could also go along with number eight. The destruction of movement or vision is also a distraction that will allow escape or application of a technique. Pain is a helluva distraction, you can give pain with or without destruction, the situation you are in dictates which you need.

As I mentioned before, these concepts and principles are not the only ones that you will be taught at the beginning level. They are the ones that a beginner should try to incorporate into their training. By doing this the beginner will lay a strong foundation, which is paramount to becoming more than an average martial artist. Think of it as learning to roll over as a baby, this is necessary before they can learn to crawl.

Hard Fist Second level

1. Relaxation/Flexible limbs- It is imperative to learn to relax. Relaxation gives you flexibility, speed and power. It also allows you to move with and around the opponent, instead of against them. Flexible limbs let you body contour, strike with unexpected weapons and counter much more efficiently.

2. First Come, First Served- This means attack what your opponent is attacking you with. When you damage attacking tools their attacks are less effective. This doesn't only mean attack arms and legs, balance can also be the first served. You give yourself a lot of leeway in a fight by taking offense from your opponent.

THE FOUR FISTS' OF SHEN CHUAN...(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10)

3. The Trampoline Effect- The trampoline effect is when you intercept an attack and use its momentum and the opponents body to accelerate your attack. Much like double bouncing on a trampoline causes you go higher. This is also referred to as the Pool Ball effect. You can allow the opponents attack to accelerate and change the direction of your counter, like on a pool table.

4. Check and Control- Checking means to put a part of your body in a position to keep your opponent from being able to take direct action against you. Leaving your hand on an arm or placing your leg in a position to stop movement are examples. Controlling comes from checking, you can control the movement of a opponent by checking motion or balance.

5. Push Drag- This is one of the key concepts of Shen Chuan. Driving off of the back foot and floating the front foot to the opponent, transferring weight to the front foot then dragging the back foot up into position is the proper method. This little motion gives you a tremendous physical and psychological advantage. You are like a freight train and when executed properly you are as about as easy to stop. This motion can turn your opponent from offense to defense before they know what happened. They will be fighting backing up and you can stay on them like ugly on ape.

6. Flow- This is also a key principle. Flowing has many connotations in Shen Chuan. One way to flow is to throw rapid relaxed strikes at multiple targets high and low. Another way is to move smoothly from striking to locking to throwing in any order. Higher levels of flowing, which are done in later Fists, include letting your opponent do what he wants until he doesn't want it anymore. Flowing from external to internal and back when necessary is another example.

7. Marriage of Gravity- This principle is nothing more than utilizing the acceleration of gravity for your own benefit. If you can strike at a down angle, relax and let gravity take your strike down, this will give you more penetration with less effort. When you are throwing someone, again relax and let gravity assist. This principle is integral in the later principle of blending.

8. Levers and Small Circle - At Level Two you should focus not only on the particular locking technique, but more on what makes it work. This will allow you to begin locking with more precision and less muscle. Another benefit later on, is the ability to find nontraditional locks. Keys to focus on are, locks are nothing more than levers, they must have a base and a fulcrum, locks should be done on as small a point and with as small a motion as possible. Relaxation is key to these points, at this Level you should be beginning to relax.

9. Transference of Energy- This concept goes along with relaxation and marriage of gravity. The idea is to transfer all of your energy into your technique and therefore your opponent. When you strike, relax and strike through not into your target. When you lock, lock through the joint. Again, when you throw, throw through the ground not to the ground. This is accomplished mainly by visualization. You must visualize your attack as going through paper or mist when you launch it.

10. Work High and Low- This means exactly that, work high and low. Keep your opponent off balance by moving your attacks around. You can incorporate checking and controlling in this also. For example check low, strike high, check high, strike the opposite side. The combinations are limited only by your imagination and the situation. The goal should be to work high and low simultaneously. You could also add to this side to side, when given the chance change sides. Anything you can do to confuse or confound the opponent is obviously a good thing.

When you have begun to understand and apply the concept and principles of Level Two you are ready to "crawl". You should be in the Brown Belt ranks and in six months to a year be ready to test for Black Belt. It is very important to incorporate the Level One and Level Two concepts and principles into your practice. By doing this, you will have set your mental and physical attributes on the right track to move higher in rank and higher in your understanding of martial arts.

THE FOUR FISTS' OF SHEN CHUAN...(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

Hard Fist Third Level

1. Body contouring/ Incidental Striking- When you have relaxed and you flow, you will begin to follow the contours of your opponents body. This gives you “highways” for target acquisition. Your opponents body will guide you to the right targets to strike, lock etc. Incidental striking goes along with this in that you will begin to give “little” strikes to your opponent without volition. This must be learned by doing, it is very difficult if not impossible to teach this as technique. It kind of just happens when you understand and apply the earlier concepts and principles.

2. Attack the body's weak points- All of the techniques in Shen Chuan train you to do this. Now is the time to focus on what is happening and where. You need to focus on angles of attack and the precise points of insertion of that attack. The weak points include accupressure points, nerve points and important joint connections. You can take this principle as far as studying Kyusho-jitsu, but it is not necessary. We take a very simplistic view that these areas cause results based on physics and physiology, not magic or mystical energy.

3. Imbalancing- This principle is built on balance, relaxation, marriage of gravity and blending. A keen understanding of your own balance in addition to the above mentioned will allow you to take away your opponents balance very easily. You need to know where the points of imbalance are based on the stance of your opponent. They are basically in a triangle or as I prefer an oval around a person.

They constantly change with both upper and lower body motion. Connecting with your opponent also changes them.

4. Create Space to Take Away Space- I call this Body English, from the billiards term for putting spin on the ball to place it where you are at an advantage for the next shot. Moving into someone and not getting caught with your hands too close to be effective is not an easy maneuver. You must keep moving into the person with your legs while staying flexible at the hips and creating space to strike or lock with your upper torso. Keeping your balance while performing this is done by maintaining forward momentum.

5. Focus on the Smallest Point Possible- At this level you should do this during both strikes and locks. When striking, strike with the smallest part of your weapon. If the weapon is your fist then hit with only one knuckle. With an open hand use only the wrist bone sometimes called the ox jaw. This minimizes surface area and therefore increases penetration. This principle also applies to the target you are striking. Don't just hit the person in the neck, hit them on a vital point and do more damage. When locking, the application of the lock should be to the smallest point of the weak areas of the joint. This increases the effectiveness of the lock. You cause more pain with less effort and you can destroy the joint faster if needed.

6. Sensitivity to Touch/Sticking- I liken this to a wet beach towel being thrown on someone. That towel just seems to smother, and it feels difficult to get off. The best way to learn sensitivity and sticking is to just practice. There are many drills that help develop this skill. One that comes to mind is the Filipino Hand Drill. The keys to gaining this skill are relaxation and flow. You must relax and respond to your opponent's movements with a flowing action. I sometimes use the visualization of suckers on my hand or arm that will not allow me to lose contact with my opponent.

The rank of First Degree Black Belt is primarily Hard Fist third level. You have reached the walking stage of your martial arts life and are getting ready to run. Third level also lays the foundation of Hard-Soft Fist and Soft-Hard Fist. Some of our Black Belts have not been willing to make the move to the higher levels, there is nothing wrong with that. They are very good martial artists and will with practice remain so. They will however find that even if they continue practicing they will begin to lose the vitality of youth and the Hard Fist becomes more difficult to practice. They will begin to make modifications of their technique so they can continue to practice. What they are doing is moving into the higher levels they chose to avoid earlier in their martial arts life.

In a future newsletter I will discuss the next “fist” of Shen Chuan, the “hard-soft” fist.

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