

# Buddhism and Martial Arts

## Living Buddha Dechan Jueren

June 7, 2003

[Lohan School of Shaolin](#), Las Vegas, Nevada

Translated by: Kuo

Transcribed by: Chang Zhi De Jian



It has been a long time since I have been here to talk to you. Today, I have seen some of you practice martial arts and it looks like you are getting better.

Tonight, I think I will talk a little bit about Buddhism and martial arts, the relationship of these two things. Martial arts not just originated from the east, from everywhere in the world they have their own forms of martial arts practice. However, martial arts originated in the east, most of those forms of practice either come from the Buddhist practitioners, or the Taoist practitioners.

Of course, in the ...?... of China they also have different systems of martial arts, referring to the internal and external system. It's a common understanding if you really want to attain to a high skill, a high accomplishment in the martial arts practice you must also based on what we call the martial artist virtue. It's actually a universal principle for everything in this world, only when you have virtue and merits will you ever attain to that level, lacking that and you will never, will only be at a certain stage, you will never be able to surpass that.

Where is that virtue and merit come from? If you really want to get somewhere with your discipline, then you must have that great merits in order to attain that great realization, the truth to your own form of discipline. It's very simple, you want to have that great merit ...?... virtue then first you must understand about how to respect others. Only he who truly understands how to respect others, will receive other's true respect. When you have really learned how to truly respect others that means you are no longer limited by your own perceptions. When no longer limited by limitations, when one no longer limited by yourself and the conditions of your environment, then you become greater in your heart. As your heart is becoming greater your martial art forms and disciplines will advance to a higher stage.

Most people don't realize this, martial art practice, the main purpose is not just to have a healthy body. Real martial art disciplines are through certain ways of training the self to overcome the ego, even to challenge ones own limitation, or physical limitations. So by challenging ones self in terms of practicing your martial arts you will go beyond your own limitations, you have to know yourself in order to overcome yourself, overcome yourself and your martial art practice will attain to a higher skillful level.

When I say your martial art has reached a higher level than that form of martial art must involve both forms in terms...you know...sort of like yin and yang, not just appear to be very powerful, but at the same time very flexible, you must have both quality in your practice to be getting to a higher stage.

In the Buddhist teachings, Buddhist teaching advocates tolerance, to be receptive of others, to be able to forgive others. Only when one really learns how to forgive others having tolerance will that person really understand about compassion. So if you understand this simple reasoning, tolerance and compassion are the basic advocate teachings of the religions, not just Buddhism. Then among the different religious schools, there should not be arguing or fighting among them about their dogmatic teachings, when they're talking about the same thing, then that's what they focus on.

We should say every school does come from the same family. Only having tolerance will they understand each other, will they have compassion in this world. As I said, topic for today is Buddhism and Martial arts, same goes for martial arts as what I described to you about Buddhism. So, if I may be so bold to say, every form, every school of martial art all comes from the same school actually. Of course a martial art practitioner is not only propagating his culture but to train ones own physical body to have good health, also will live a longer life. And also, it is really a form of martial art practice when you attain to that stage, yourself and nature come together as one.

Martial artists have a lot of movement, when your movements and all and everything in nature becomes one, the sense of every animal, plants, they also move, when your movements and their movements become one, you begin to realize something else. This idea goes the same as in the Buddhist teaching. In Buddhist teachings when you continue to know yourself well, and you begin to really know yourself, and you understand you have to change yourself, you will begin to change. Only one who is able to continue changing himself and become adaptive will he be able to change his own condition, his own environment. When one is able to change the conditions of his environment, then he will begin to grasp about time, and how arising conditions, and understand about time, how things happen to be and so on.

In other words, if you wish to help others, then first you have to learn ways of helping yourself. Only he who is able to help himself, will he

have the possibility to help others. The question is how, what do you do to learn how to help yourself. If you really want to learn to help yourself well then first you have to become receptive and be able to accept others. It's all about changing habit, able to change one's habits, or habitual things one does all the time. Habits often are not gonna do much to your advancement. By becoming receptive, and accepting others teachings, doesn't necessarily mean that will not bring you more understanding. I'm saying every realizations, every understandings, comes from be able to open up, become receptive to others.

Whatever new understanding of new knowledge that you may begin to learn or accept, you will also want to examine and prove for yourself whether it's realistic or fanatical. So when you have learned something new, and proven to yourself its effectiveness then you will believe that you have received some good teaching.

We also understand the most difficult thing to overcome is really one's self. How to overcome one's self? Overcoming one's self, changing one's self, these are the basic teachings of Buddhism. Most of us really are unable to overcome our self, we have been limited by our self. The reason for that is we don't really know ourselves well. When I say knowing one's self, you know, we only really know the superficial stuff. We do not really see our true whole self. Only when you truly know yourself well, is there gonna be any possibility that you will change.

That idea is the same in even the martial artist, not just Buddhist. It's about physical conditioning, the same thing in overcoming your self. The more you train your body, the more stamina you will have. The range of arm movements, even though it's predetermined, it only moves in certain ways. When I say predetermined, it's actually your habitual movement, you only habitually know how to move in this way.

Really, martial arts disciplines, you have to change your habitual movements. Only by continually changing your habitual movements, will you begin to realize a certain movement that fits you even better. In other words, only when you really able to overcome yourself, your own limitations, will you begin to change the conditions of your environment. It's the same idea, whether for martial arts or Buddhist practice. The real form of martial art practice, in the beginning, some people, it's very tiresome work, more like military training or

something. In the beginnings of learning martial art you feel very tired, your body is not used to this kind of movement. So certainly, in the beginning your body is not used to it, it takes time to adapt to it, and through some time of practice and training, your body and your mind begin to become accustomed to certain movements.

In other words, what I'm saying is, every kind of knowledge, just like martial art practice is in the process of actually doing it or reexamining it you begin to realize its truth. And only through that process of practicing will you begin to, you will also discover yourself, that you are really lazy in many ways. And you will also realize, overcoming that laziness, or habit of laziness, is very hard. And if you really want to overcome your habit of laziness then you have to find it's root cause. Only when you have found the root cause of how you begin to develop that habit of laziness, then you will be able to overcome it. And only when you actually begin to change your habit of laziness, then will discover, that many things about you begin to change.

So how does one happen to have this habit of laziness? As I say, it is habitual, you just grow up with it, and develop this habit. And how does that happen, habitually? It's really from our sense of bad nature, or animal nature. When I say that most people don't really see their own bad side, only when people truly recognize their own bad nature, will they begin to change their habit of laziness.

How does that bad nature begin? It's really from desire that surpassed reality, as in desire that we should not have. Why do I call it desire that we should not have? Let me tell you about this, some people say, people should not have desire. However, this statement, I don't believe it's correct, every word, because when, let's say, a person has no more desire at all, then he has no more aspiration, in that sense. If people have no aspiration for anything, than society will never progress, it will only degenerate. So, the correct way to put it should be desire that should happen, or certain desires should have. For example, you practice martial arts. When you are able to overcome your bad nature, your habit of laziness, then you have this sense of striving forward. And when this kind of striving forward and striving for more, then this sense of not enough begins to happen in you, you will want more. This kind of unsatisfactory feeling within you is the motivation for you to move on, to strive for higher teachings.

Any teacher certainly wish his own students will definitely pass his own teacher. So a good practitioner not only skillfully, in terms of skill able to surpass the teacher, but certainly he needs to surpass, strive for that goal, desire to surpass everyone in the world. Now let's say that this person is kind of an idealist, then he is able to accomplish that. And in the sense that he goes by his accomplishment to surpass everyone, he has to push that art form, in this case, martial art form disciplines to a higher accomplishment, higher skills. A higher level. This type of desire I refer to is the motivation to move you to a higher stage. This type of desire we need.

However, the form of desire I refer to that we should not have is about fantasizing. Fantasize form of desires, actually are stumbling blocks, obstacles. When I refer to something that is fantasizing desire, I refer to something that will never happen. If you dream and fantasize about many things you want to accomplish, however it's impossible to happen until you get something else done first, then you are wasting your time. You need to focus on something to work on yourself. For example, just for the sake of elaborating what I meant to make it clear, "I'm a martial artist. I practice very hard, I want to strive to this attainment of martial art discipline. I want to be able to fly, like I grow wings." It's impossible desire for it to happen. So in the sense of Buddhist teachings also the same, how to overcome that desire that we should not have. This is also very important.

Now if you think about it, everyone of us, every day, whether we intend to or not, it happens all the time, every day we will have all sorts of questions that will come up in our head. What I mean is every day we have so many questions, even before this question is answered, another question already comes up, and more questions, more questions. And how are all these questions happening? What will all these questions bring to us? If we think about it again, why is it that every one in the world alive today, different social levels, status, each person, has their own type of worries, their own type of pains?

How do all these worries or pains or defilements happen? Where are that sense of pains come from? To put simply, our worries and pains comes from our own desire that we should not have. Because all this fantasizing desire, or desire that we should not have, it continues to happen, arise within you, and at the same time you are unable to know yourself well, discover your own bad nature and habit of

laziness, because you are unable to change yourself. You begin to realize whatever you thought about or fantasize in general about, it doesn't match up with the reality that happens to you. You found out that whatever things you do you don't feel good about it, it seems you are not doing a good job. It's very simple because you haven't really found the root cause.

The real cause for your unsatisfactory feeling, and people begin to feel that perhaps I have bad luck. But let me say, anyone's luck, one ought, should be able to change it. Every thing about a person can be changed. But if you really want a change, then you must change yourself first. Only by continually and truly changing yourself will you be able to change the conditions of your environment. But to change what part of you? To change, overcome your habit of laziness, your animal nature. When you have extinguished your animal nature, and every bit of laziness, and you become very studious in many ways, and you truly become a really hard working person, only someone who knows how to be industrial and really understands about hard working sense, will lead to really understand about many things.

A person becomes very good at observing things, understands the relationship of many things, understanding about following up on many things. So what I mean is that that person at that stage is so good at observing things, that these realistic, his head is not wasting his energies on nonsense questions, but he keeps to what really matters. Because this person no longer has so many wandering thoughts and questions in his head, therefore, whatever wrong things happen to him, he can see it clearly. Therefore he sees clearly his conditions, his environment, because he sees so clearly everything that transpires, he will no longer have worries and fear.

Everyone often likes to say I run into bad luck because certain bad things happen, that person really doesn't see, to really see himself clearly, to be able to change. Only when a person truly has learned how to change will he begin to see life. Talk about this, it's the same idea you are a martial artist, striving, practicing martial art trying to develop your attainments in this art form.

It's actually by tradition, if a Sifu is really very hard on their students practicing martial art discipline, then the students will advance to a higher stage, they will be better at their art form. It's a old Chinese

saying, I don't know if this would work in the U.S. Because when I was young, we have to learn martial art in China, we don't have this kind of ground, this ground is too nice. In the forest, whatever ground happen to be, that's' it. Horse stance, that's how we do horse stance, put a stick of incense in the earth and you squat over that stick of incense. Perhaps this kind of discipline is not allowed in the U.S. When I was young, when we learn Tan Tui (you know Tan Tui, right?), then the teacher will have a stick in his hand, if your feet cannot kick high enough, expect that stick will land on you, faster than your leg can move back.

So all the beginning students, certainly, everybody receives plenty of beatings from that stick. In the U.S. you would not be able to train your student like this, you would not dare to. I talk about martial art and Buddhist practice. For the Buddhist practitioner, it's the same way. If you cannot memorize your mantra in so many days, kneel, until you know your mantra. Of course, I have not done that in the U.S. However this is still the discipline in China. If you broke the rules, go against disciplines, there certainly real punishment. I tell you about this, I don't mean to ask your Sifu to beat you with a stick. What I'm talking about is this idea, when the teacher is really tough on the students, that is the only way to overcome the student's habits, so the students will attain to a higher accomplishment and be better at his discipline.

Till today in China, for the real good martial art masters, all the students bowing to their master, certainly gets their fair share of beatings. But this is called martial arts, by the time the master can no longer beat up his student, that student has certainly attained his martial art skills. In China, the students certainly can challenge the master anytime. However, today in China, openly you don't see this anymore, only in secret, in private, that form discipline still is. But if you go to the real grass roots, go to the deep forest where there are real masters and real practitioners, the discipline is still the same, he just pick up stick and beat the students until the student can defend himself.

I remember when I learned this, my teacher told me this, he said, very simple, it's really about the art of fighting, two people fighting each other, if you cannot kill your opponent in a few seconds, you have lost. So what I'm talking about, whatever you see in movies and on T.V.,

how two guys beating each other, and it goes on for an hour and they never finish each other off. It is impossible. They would tire to death before they ever get a chance to kill each other. In the form of martial art practice, it's that split moment, where you concentrate all your power in that moment, you certainly have to build up your strength for that moment of power. In the battle field, it's very simple, it's only a split second where all your strength is focused on that one point, that's where you will win your opponent.

More important, you have to understand about how to borrow others strength in order to reciprocate that strength back to him. And about qi, how to find the source of that qi, how to borrow it, and how to expel it. So in internal martial art discipline, it does not matter about size or strength of the muscle of person. The stronger that opponent is, if you are able to borrow it, you can always dissolve his strength.

So when I was young, and practicing martial arts, I learned many things that what I see you have learned here. When we were young and practicing, flexibility is certainly a very important lesson, we have to kick the feet high and able to hold it up in the air. If you can't really face your bottom of feet to the sky, you will have a rope tied to it and pulled down and hold that position. In the future, if we have this opportunity to make it happen, then we will have Steven here pick some of his students here and go to China, we will meet some real good martial art masters in China. I talk about all these real martial art masters in China, they are not well known. They are not well known in the martial art field at all, they don't show up. Their real practice is not about physical education. Most modern day martial art practice is just about physical education. I continue to stress this point, whether for Buddhist practice or martial art practice, if you really want your skills to get to a real advanced level, you definitely have to overcome two things, your animal nature and your habit of laziness.

When I was young and we do our martial art practice, why do we have to get up at 3 in the morning, and be able to answer the teacher's role call at 3 in the morning? It does matter about the hour of practice. 3 am is the 3rd hour in the Chinese zodiac, the 3rd sign is tiger, 3 am is the coldest hour for that 24 hour day. 3 am is when its coldest, that means it's the rising of the yang energy. That's what time will be you want to catch the first ...?.... in that sense. Because martial art is not

just about body movement, it's about breathing, you know, qi, you have to catch that rising hours for the yang energy or that qi to come up. That's why you need to get up at 3 am to do your first practice to really catch that right. Because that's the hour just before sunrise, just before the sun appears in the horizon. After the sun come up the horizon a couple of hours, there's a big difference, you want to be able to catch that moment. That's why when you do your practice at those hours your body, your awareness will have different sensations. You will pick up different perceptual feelings.

Of course when I was young, our teachers certainly also give us pills eat. Different things, medicine stuff. These herbal medicines for the purposes of readying the body to make you become more alert. In that time, every morning we get up that early, straight punch 3000 times, kick 3000 times, daily routine. You ask your students to do 3000 punch and 3000 kick every day? Why is that the teacher in China they really ask you to do this, force you to do this, 3000 punch and kick in one day, every day for a long time? Why? To overcome your animal nature, to overcome your laziness, to really overcome your limitations. Martial arts is not about learning movement and learning how to do it, it's about training one's self, and overcoming limitations.

And learning about Buddha-Dharma is also the same idea, you learn how to know yourself well, to be able to change your self by overcoming your own limitation. Through that process of learning to know yourself well for the Buddhist practitioners, time does matter, there's certain hour of the day to go through your practice. In a real disciplined temple, of course modern day temple they don't follow that well, in a real discipline temple, there are still certain temple that do this, you get up at 3 am. 3 am is when you report to the main hall to do your first lessons. 2 pm to 5 pm is self study period. And 7 pm to 10 pm will be the evening lesson. If you have followed what I say this way of spending so many hours of going through your lessons and practice does not place that limits on the students. But in the way of training one's self under the limitation of those scheduled time, you have to adhere to discipline to discover yourself. When you have truly changed your own animal natures and when you have truly no more habit of laziness, adhere to that discipline, then suddenly your thinking change to a different level. What that means is really called transcendence begin to happen in your mind, when that experience

happens to you, that transcendence really happens, then you will have wisdom.

So for the martial artist it's all the same, if you have overcome your limitations, adhere to a very hard discipline, when that transcendence happens to the martial artist, you will begin to have a new realization, a new wisdom, new understanding about movements, about how to move your body. And I say that transcendence happens, really, if you get to that level in the sense you really begin to have that insight to everybody's body, physical movements, then you don't even have to practice martial art anymore after that. In a sense, you can lay down and go to sleep, and you will understand, you can sense, you are aware of all this movements, you will certainly see to the rule of it, you will know how to do everything.

When I say the practice, it's only for the beginners, in the beginning stage, everybody have to do the practice. When the practitioners get to that transcendence level, then he will be at a different level. And if he go up further, (Kuo: really there's no term word for it in perfect English but Chinese call it something like, not just transcending, but really change completely over) you are at a unbelievable level. If you are really that good, become the master of martial arts, at that kind of level, ...?... will certainly be difference than anybody else's, nobody will be able to fake them.

Because you are also at a stage, that the more master you have in your disciplines, then the greater your heart becomes, the greater your mind also extend. The greater heart you have, the better you will be at helping others. You really get knowing how to help others well, then that's where you will have greater virtue, greater merits. With greater merits and virtues, your discipline, your practice will even attain to a greater, higher level. So in other words, you really have to understand, where you will be at your attainment, your accomplishments in your practice does depend a lot on how much merits and virtues you have.

Throughout Chinese history, there are many famous martial artists. They become famous martial artist because of their virtue. So in the Buddhist practice, many priests or monks were referred to as maha...?... or great self, great meritorious self. Because these practitioners attain to that level they are receptive of everything,

they accept, and tolerate everyone. To put it simply, what does it mean to really have tolerance for everything? In other word, he is able to forgive anyone. So it means it does not matter how you may hurt him, he will always forgive you.

How are you to attain to that level that you really have such great heart, able to tolerate and forgive everyone? There's a common saying, a Buddha sees every living being as his own father and mother. Buddha treats every being as the way he would treat and respect his own parents. Of course I always say, eastern cultures certainly have fundamental difference compared to western cultures. It's the traditions, obey and honor your parents, you should have no condition. So piety and respect your parents is part of virtue. Because without parents, you would not even have your physical body. Do you realize that without a physical body ...?... talk about enjoyment ...?... the pains, you would not even be able to experience pain. So in the eastern culture traditions it's a common teachings for everything, a person first should learn about respect, and piety to the parents.

And what are the ways of respect? So it's a Chinese sayings, if a child has respect for the parents, then the child will certainly follow the parents commands. In other words, whatever the parents commands, the children will follow accordingly. Why is the saying, a Buddha sees every living being as his own father and mother. Let's say you are able to really begin to have that respect, treat everyone as your own parents. Then you will be able to bear any criticism from anybody. If somebody accosted you or is criticizing you, if you really feel it's just my parents said this to me, then you will have that respect for them, and you won't have any anger. You won't be in anger, I don't mean, bottle up your anger. You will actually have no anger. Because, most people do know how to forgive their parents. Now if, no matter how others treat you, you are always able to forgive anyone, by seeing them as your own parents, I say this, only when you really able to do this, in your heart, something else begin to change, something else will reveal to you.

When you don't know how to really do this yet, and whatever I refer to that means it will not reveal to you, this change will not happen in you. So if you have yet to have that reveal to you, no matter how I describe and talk about it, you will still not really understand what I'm trying to say. However, I say, only when you truly able to do this,

knowing how to forgive others, then something else will change within you, something else will happen. Whatever this thing will begin to change already in your heart, you begin to have great tolerance. And only by having that great tolerance, become receptive to all and everything, wisdom will begin to reveal. So until you are truly able to do this, no matter how I describe it, until you carry out and to actually make it happen yourself, no matter how I try to tell you about this thing that will reveal itself to you, it's hard for you to understand.

Because people have this kind of habit, their habit is hard for them to give up. So when most people cannot forgive other people, in my view, I don't see them as wrong. I don't see them necessarily as wrong. Why? Because I understand about people's perspective. They see things the way they see it. But if you really able to do this, to be able to forgive others, then certainly, you cannot say is wrong. It's a saying in the east, the saying, even though it's from east, I think westerners also have this saying, about the same, if you really have been taken advantage of, heaven will give whatever is taken from you. If you will really been taken advantage of, and you truly forgive whoever took advantage of you, something that you will not be able to imagine will happen to you.

When I say this, from Chinese history, whether from Buddhist history, there are many examples that can prove this point. Most of us know this without having to spell out that the common goal of every religious teaching, they are all the same, whatever religion, they talk about compassion, love, tolerance and respects. So having tolerance, what does that mean? To put in other terms, having tolerance is to be able to forgive others. Because only by knowing how to forgive others, really able to forgive others, you will demonstrate that you have compassion. So if this is the common teachings of every religion, then what happened on modern days, many different religious schools, arguing and fighting each others, that's a mistake. People accept and respect each others, then they will have virtue.

© 1999-2021 Dari Rulai Temple

[www.dari-rulai-temple.org](http://www.dari-rulai-temple.org)

[www.esoterichanmi.com](http://www.esoterichanmi.com)

**Meditation & Healing**  
*from the Chinese Esoteric School*

