

The Spirit of the Shaolin Temple

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The Head of the Qufu Shaolin Martial Arts School (China), Master Shi Yan Jia, has in furtherance of the shared educational partnership with Qi China International kindly provided an article detailing the daily life of the Shaolin Monk. His account provides a most important description of life at the renowned Songshan Shaolin Temple and the special inter-relationship between the world renowned heritage of Shaolin gong fu and Chan [Zen] Buddhism.

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By Master Shi Yan Jia

Shaolin Kung Fu is technically speaking the martial arts system of attack and defense movements that uses forms (series of moves combinations: *Wǐ taolu*) as a basic method of training. Both the moves and their combinations are based on Traditional Chinese Medicine's theory about the working of the human body. The cultural and spiritual aspect of Shaolin Kung Fu comes through its essential roots in Chan Buddhism, the first belief shared by practitioners. This is especially the case in regards to wisdom and strength; for wisdom, the Buddha Puti Damo (below left) is worshipped to and for strength, the Buddha Jin Na Luo Wang (below right) is taken refuge in.

A typical day for a Shaolin Temple Monk

Early at five o'clock every morning, the monks of the Shaolin Temple arise with the striking of the gong. They join together to start the first morning class of the day, lasting for 90 minutes. At 06:40, monks mindfully join a line in the Zhai Tang (place where the monks have food) to have breakfast. Before and after the meal, monastic chanting is carried out. Every monk has his own alms bowl with food in it and is not allowed to leave anything uneaten. During this meal time, everyone is to keep silent. Between 08:00-09:00 the monks study Buddhism where dharma learning is taught to cultivate knowledge and wisdom. Between 09:10-11:30, there is study time to practice Kung Fu at the back of a nearby mountain.

Lunch is then taken afterwards at 11:40 in a similar manner to breakfast, some grand masters and scholastic monks however do not eat lunch in order to enter fully into their monastic life and study. Afternoon training time then takes place between 14:00-17:30. After a short rest, members of the temple go to the monastery for evening chanting which lasts an hour. The final part of a day is a 45 minute meditation period followed by a period for self-study that lasts until the sound of the bell again at 21:30 which signals the end of the day.

Shaolin Kung Fu's Nine Steps of learning:

1. 知 Knowledge: In various ways, begin to know about Shaolin Kung Fu and the Song Shan Shaolin Temple
2. 信 Admiration: Feel moved by the spirit and character of Shaolin Kung Fu and so be naturally energised towards it.
3. 立 Ambition: Start to plan your life again after the feeling of your heart and making the decision to learn Shaolin Kung Fu. After setting a specific goal, set your mind to realize that ambition in your lifetime.

4. 志 (Enthusiasm): Make a self-affirmation of the goals chosen and pursue with a one-pointed determination of love and dedication.
5. 行 (Action): Adapt your goal to specific courses of action and start to practice Shaolin Kung Fu. This will be a hard learning process.
6. 解 (Understand): Come to rational knowing and the cultural connotations of Shaolin Kung Fu.
7. 信 (Faith): Start to transform rational understanding into a deeper understanding about Buddhism. Shaolin Kung Fu is considered one way of learning Chan Buddhism (and so named "Wushu Chan";).
8. 觉 (Awareness): Practice Shaolin Kung Fu from a deeper self belief enabling practice to become not just a goal but an effective path to becoming aware and realising the essence of Buddhism.
9. 悟 (Nature): From learning Shaolin Kung Fu, develop a full understanding about wisdom and strength, see the truth of life and the universe.

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Master Shi Yan Jia (Wei Shifu) is a 34th generation Shaolin Disciple of the current Shaolin Temple Abbot the Venerable Shi Yong Xin, came to the Shaolin Temple to learn Shaolin Kungfu from the age of 8 years old and stayed there for a further ten years. He is currently ranked at level 7*. He has 8 years of experience in teaching Kung Fu to international students from all over the world and giving performances to many people.

In the 1st national Shaolin Kung Fu competition Master Shi Yan Jia was awarded first place in traditional Shaolin Fist form and Shaolin Spear form. At the 9th Sports Meeting in Henan province, he also won first place for his Shaolin Staff routine, and in the championships of Zhengzhou, he came first in the Traditional Sword form category.

Master Shi Yan Jia's school is located in the historic city of Qufu (eastern Shandong Province), hometown of the great Chinese philosopher, Confucius.