



Orchard Kung Fu

The Martial Way of Vitality



Willow Bends

The Rolling the Pearl curriculum includes Willow Bends as part of the development toward moving spontaneously while in unpredictable circumstances. The framework is that we set ourselves in facing *ma bu* and are not allowed to step. We can use the Willow Bends game to develop whole body pushing power, improve rotation of the *yao*, study power linkages from the foot to the hand, learn how to neutralize force applied to our structure, feel the 8 lines of balance on ourselves and our partners, attack while neutralizing, study our mindset under pressure, control our centerline, free our hands, and on and on.

In the beginning, it is important for the student to learn to find the partner's centre of gravity and ridgepole and triangulate them up or down along any of the 6 weak lines of balance. Often it is instructive to smoothly press upon a static foe and feel where his/her balance breaks easily. Ideally, we want to develop the skill to do this without conscious analysis; it should become as natural as maintaining your ridgepole in the presence of gravity. The push we deliver must come from the leg through the *yao* and into the arm. It is not merely a shove of the arm.

Then we want to learn to neutralize the foe's press upon our centre. Shifu Castaldo's progressive Dragon Rolling the Pearl curriculum gets us to do this by wedging through the attack (not against it or sideways to it) and into the foe's centre by using his momentarily framed (arm-body-leg-ground) attack as a bridge. This moves us quickly to the concept of simultaneous attack/defence (with a single arm, no less). Any of the five circles can be employed during this movement. This wedge must begin as soon as you sense the foe's incursion into your territory. Any lag will be difficult to recover from.

Consistent Pressure should be maintained, especially in the beginning. While at Shifu Painter's level you have internalized things so well that you can break rules and do the seemingly impossible, the rest of us should progress stepwise. Choose a feeling of pressure between your partner's arms and your arms. It can be any hypothetical pressure but is best if the pressure is firm but lighter rather than heavier (say 5-10 lbs.). Strive to not exceed this pressure during the game and your sensitivity to potential threats, to your partner's lines of balance, to your partner's ridgepole, and to your own balance will dramatically improve. Even when you have gained the advantage, do not drastically increase the pressure; rather shift more, rotate the *yao* and move into and through the foe's space along a weak line. The feeling can be quite effortless. I like to wait until I'm invited in instead of knocking down the door. That image gives me the patience to wait until the time is right and the application of the wedge is effortless before I move.

Rolling the Contact Point – When you feel the pressure building on your arm or your ridgepole, the most natural thing in the world is to resist that pressure with all your might. “Never give ground” and “this is my space” tend to be reflexive thoughts for most of us. For the rest, it tends to be “run” or “disappear” or “escape” and none of these are useful in the long run either. In order to get the most out of Shifu Castaldo's “Rolling the Contact Point” concept we must slow



Orchard Kung Fu

The Martial Way of Vitality



down to Speed 3 initially. Allow yourself to feel the physical pressure build at the point of contact until you can sense it through the arm, across the yao, into the leg and foot, and into the ground. Once you can perceive this line of *jin* (force), you can rotate the point of contact and move the pressure off the line that goes through your centre. Shifu Castaldo emphasizes that we should not merely perpetually slip the pressure, but eventually develop the mindset and skill to see the point of contact as the gateway to control the foe.

Constant Speed is essential. You are trying to replicate skills useful in full speed altercations. In full Speed 1 movement, you are moving as fast as possible; nearly no one is 3-5 times faster than everyone else. Occasionally you may meet someone who moves like a turtle compared to you, but why would you focus your training on how to overcome only very slow opponents on Valium? I would think we want to mimic the condition where our opponent is highly skilled and fearsome. If you have no advantage in physical attributes, how sensitive you are and how smoothly you can change and how coordinated you are makes all the difference.

There is much more. For now, try to use patience, move slowly, feel, rotate the *yao*, shift the weight, rotate the contact point, and maintain constant pressure. Understand it is a “game” to train attribute development and not a contest or developing explicit tactical applications. Let the principles flow from one situation to another. The techniques are ephemeral and will only hinder you in novel circumstances while the principles endure.

Let me know if this was useful, and get your butts to the Gompa or the nearest and soonest workshop! If you weren't there last year, why not? If you haven't booked your visit this year, what are you waiting for? We all need correction! Self-training is essential, but corrective training with someone more skilled than you is indispensable.

Train with attention!

Dr. Yancy Orchard