

## **Fishing for I-Chuan**

I have been studying with Sifu Fong for a year now and would like to try and shed some light on one aspect of I-Chuan as I have come to understand it. Namely, in aligning the body properly so that one is in the 100-yard dash position, and then being able to transfer the power generated. Prior to studying I-Chuan with Sifu Fong, I had primarily studied Ba Gua and Hsing-I. During this time, I attended university in a very hot climate. Not wanting to endure the heat of summer, I would travel to Alaska where I spent my summers working as a commercial fisherman.

I mention my work as a commercial fisherman because I believe it has helped me to better understand the concept of placing one's self in the 100-yard dash position and also in stopping that momentum to release one's power. It is my hope that by touching on the similarities between commercial fishing and this type of kung-fu training that I can better explain the body sensation developed in I-Chuan. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that my recognizing the correlation between these two activities came from the body sensations generated by the activities themselves. In other words, I did not sit down and think, "How can I relate my I-Chuan training to commercial fishing?" Rather, one day while standing, my mind recognized that I had experienced this kind of activity in my body many times before.

While commercial fishing, it is usually the case that you are engaged in work while the ship is being tossed about the waves. As you are focused on the task at hand and therefore unable to look about the condition of the seas, often times you feel the effects of the waves before you can see them coming. For example, as the ship motors up the first part of a wave just prior to cresting it, one's body is pulled sharply back, and your weight falls squarely on your hind leg. To counteract this motion, one jets their front knee forward and pulls forward and down with all of their body as if pulling a wall behind them forward. As the ship crests the wave, suddenly one's weight is very quickly headed forward. In an effort to stabilize yourself as you continue to work, your efforts naturally shift to the task of stopping your forward momentum. The most natural response is to stick one's front foot out, much like stepping quickly on the brake pedal in

a vehicle. This response is simply all there is time for, at which point the process repeats itself.

As one of the requirements of I-Chuan training is to create this forward lunging sensation, I have come to realize it is very similar to what I faced when I battled waves to remain on my feet: that moment when you crest the wave and suddenly your body's momentum is quickly shifted forward. As my understanding exists today, this is the sensation practitioners of I-Chuan are not only trying to create, but also strive to maintain. It is as if there was a large weight connected to your body and you are fighting to pull it forward but at the same time not allowing yourself to move forward. This is of course as it is applied to standing. When one applies it to being mobile, the same requirements of standing must be maintained except that you must apply the brake in order to stop your momentum and release your power.

When a practitioner of I-Chuan learns to develop this lunging sensation and maintain it, he/she must also learn to be able to transfer that power to a point anywhere within their reach. As one's opponent might move to any given location at any time, so too must the I-Chuan practitioner be able to deliver that force to any point in space. The resistance required to generate the lunging body position must come from all angles. The more angles of resistance one can adopt and put into their standing, the stronger one's standing becomes.

Returning to my fishing example, I find the same thing holds true. It is often the case that several waves from varying angles will converge on the ship. As the ship reacts to the force, it might head up the side of one wave and come back down the side of a neighboring wave. Suddenly you are no longer talking about a mere forward-backward motion. The ship might list to one side and of course your body is forced to respond to this. There's a sense that you need to be ready to deal with these forces from any angle, as the waves pound the ship from all directions. After a while, one instinctually develops this sort of ready state. You are fired up and ready for anything because at a moment's notice you must be ready to shift your body's weight to counteract the force of the waves.

I have heard it said that the ability to do I-Chuan is really within all of us; the body responses required are natural one's. What much of the training is aimed at is forgetting the bad habits that we develop in the course of our lives, and re-learning how

to use the body with better efficiency and within the framework of the art. More and more I find this to be the true. When you are trying to keep from falling you simply respond to the situation, there is not much time to think about what you will do. Your body naturally wants to respond to the situation based upon how strong the force it encounters is. If you encounter a light force then you can counter it by gently leaning away from it. But, if you encounter a force that pulls you *sharply* in one direction you will naturally pull *sharply* in the other direction, employing more of the body as required. This type of response is simply within each of us and is what the I-Chuan practitioner aims to make second nature.