

Facing Your Fears

Dàyóu had walked the long rock path from Zhengzhou to the Song Mountains, home to the sacred Shaolin Temple. Dàyóu was cold and tired, his feet sore from walking on the mountainous path, with nothing but a thin robe for protection against the snow. “I have to go forward. I have to reach Shaolin.” Dàyóu told himself. He was a young boy, at the age of twenty-one, and he was determined to reach the temple, as he wanted to be accepted as a pupil under the great martial artist Sui Zhou. Dàyóu had trained in Shaolin Kung Fu at home ever since he was a little boy, and now, as he was of age, he wanted to train at Shaolin Temple to improve his kung fu even more. His family had once been renowned for their kung fu, but for the last few generations, his family had stopped training in kung fu. Dàyóu was determined to bring kung fu back to his family, and so he was headed to Shaolin Temple. After three months of perilous travel, he had finally reached the Song mountains, and was not very far from the Temple. He could hear the loud and melodious sound of the Bonshō being struck, and he began to walk faster, knowing he was almost there. Soon, he had reached the temple gate, where two monks stood. “Nǐ shì shéi?” Who are you? the monks inquired.

Dàyóu replied, “I am Dàyóu, son of Li Sheng. I have come here to seek the guidance of the great master Sui Zhou.”

The monks let Dàyóu pass and a young boy escorted him to the prayer hall. A great golden statue of Buddha dominated the hall, and abbot of the temple was seated on the ground, deep in meditation. Dàyóu was unsure whether to step forward or stay where he was when he heard the abbot speak, “Come here Dàyóu. Sit down next to me and tell me why you are here.”

Dàyóu stepped forward cautiously and sat down next to the abbot. “I wish to learn kung fu under the guidance of Sui Zhou. I have heard he lives in this temple.” spoke Dàyóu. He told the abbot about his training and how he had walked all the way from Zhengzhou. “I hope he does not reject my request,” Dàyóu said to himself.

“What is it that you want to learn from him that you have come all the way from Zhengzhou to learn?” the abbot queried.

“I want to learn the art of Taijing, most honorable abbot.” replied Dàyóu.

“If you truly want to learn Taijing, you will have to be determined. To be able to learn Taijing, you will have to pass a rigorous examination. Jun Ling has more experience in Taijing and if you pass the examinations, he will teach you better than Sui Zhou.”

“What type of examination do I need to pass?” Dàyóu questioned nervously.

“You will be tested in the fields of Confucian writings, staff fighting, and iron hand kung fu.” said the abbot.

“Please give me permission to leave and practice for my examination, most honorable abbot.” requested Dàyóu.

“You may leave, my son. Your examination will be held tomorrow evening.” replied the abbot. Dàyóu went to practice his kung fu, but he was very worried about his examination tomorrow. “Oh, merciful Buddha, please help me.” he said to himself. When he went to sleep that night, he was very scared and fearful that he would fail the exam and he would have to go back to Zhengzhou, humiliated. He kept on tossing and turning in bed, and whenever he closed his eyes, he saw pictures of a disappointed Dàyóu who had not been accepted as a pupil. He kept on waking up to get water, as he was sweating a lot in fear of the upcoming examination. He got very little sleep that night, but when he woke up the next morning, he felt a bit more confident. He went to the praying hall and kneeled down to the statue of Buddha. “Oh, merciful Buddha, please help me face my fears.” Dàyóu said out loud. “There is no illusion greater than fear. The only way to have no fear is to be confident in yourself. The only way to be confident is to be calm and witness yourself.” said the abbot. Dàyóu got a fright when he heard the abbot’s voice, as he had thought there was nobody in the hall but him.

“Oh, most honourable abbot!” Dàyóu remarked in surprise. “I did not see you here.”

“Your examination is in seven hours,” said the abbot, “you should go and practice.” Dàyóu left the hall and went to the practice grounds. As he performed the iron hand exercises, he pondered on what the abbot had said about there being no illusion greater than fear. He thought and thought, but he could not decipher what it meant. And then, it was suddenly time for the examination. Dàyóu panicked as he was walking towards the room in which he would be tested. “What do I do? What if I fail the exam!”

He arrived at the room and opened the enameled doors. He walked in the room and looked around at all the people in the room, waiting to see his performance. And then, suddenly, he

realized the meaning of what the abbot had said to him. It meant that he had to be relaxed and at peace with himself, and just do his best. Dàyóu had a newly born feeling of confidence within himself, and he aced the tests. He was therefore accepted as a pupil taught by Jun Ling. He mastered the art of Taijing; being able to be calm and relaxed when fighting, and also building body pain resistance through meditation. He returned to his family as a Shaolin kung fu master and taught many other pupils his techniques and learning of Taijing.