

Shaolin monk brings philosophy and culture to Aurora martial arts



By Jake Courtepatte

Canada's Black Belt Martial Arts was the site of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity in Aurora over the weekend, hosting a real Shaolin monk from the famous Shaolin Temple in China.

Master Shi Yuan Jiang, raised in the Temple since he was eight years old, has performed and taught around the world. He brought his skills to the centre in Aurora on Saturday to teach a group ranging from kids to adults the Shaolin practice.

Canada's Black Belt Master Instructor, Master Tim Wakefield, had the opportunity to visit the Shaolin Temple last year. Through training with the monks, he was given some valuable insight into the source of the 1600-year evolution.

It was there that he met Master Jiang, and after training extensively he encouraged him to visit Canada.

"Monks are encouraged to travel, to enhance their knowledge of martial arts," said Wakefield. "Build connections, see how the rest of the martial arts world is working, and spread the Shaolin way."

During the Cultural Revolution in China in the 1980s, the Shaolin practice was quashed by the government, sending the monks into secrecy and often only training at night. Since the early 1990's, Shaolin has once again emerged in popularity in the country, bringing back tourism and increased knowledge of the Shaolin way. Temples were rebuilt, and the monks were invited back in to practice, among them Master Jiang.

"We have one of the original ones here today," said Wakefield. "He's the real deal. We've had karate masters here, which are great and wonderful dedicated individuals, but this is taking it one step further in history."

Originally built in the year 496, the Shaolin Temple became the epicentre of martial arts training, creating the base for which different forms of martial arts would branch out from.

"We wouldn't have karate, or taekwondo, or any of these other martial arts if it weren't for what the Shaolin did," said Wakefield. "They were the first."

Wakefield describes the Shaolin practice as a "combination of Zen Buddhism, Chinese Taoist philosophy, and a few other indigenous Chinese thought processes put together, and expressed through moving meditations that resemble fighting forms."

While the students at Saturday's seminar came from all different kinds of backgrounds in martial arts, the unique thing about the Shaolin philosophy is its acceptance of all different forms.

?Shaolin doesn't care what system you come from,? said Wakefield. ?They believe that, fundamentally, we're all Shaolin.?

Focused strongly on meditation, Wakefield is quick to point out that the goal in Shaolin training is not to be fighters, or for fame or fortune, but rather a more simple approach.

?This is about being happy with your life. Using martial arts to influence it, and empower yourself to find that peaceful way. But also, if something comes our way, we're ready for it.?

Master Wakefield began his training over thirty years ago, studying the Shaolin Kemp Karate system under Master Henry Choo Chong in Richmond Hill. He has been teaching his practice in Aurora and the GTA since 1994, receiving his Eighth Degree Black Belt in Kenpo Karate in 2013.