

# Slow Down-To Speed Up

"Slow down young man. Speed will be there when you need it."

This is a quote Jimmy would say to me often as a young man in his class. As a youngster, like many, I was quite hyper and trained long, hard and at times far too fast. So I would get the talking to from Jimmy as he walked by on the studio floor. In this article, I will do my best to explain some of the reasons for the need, or should I say the necessity of slowing down in your training. Firstly, let's cover some ideas of positioning. One of the many things Jack Sera will tell us is, "Don't get in position, be in position" and "Don't be in position, be in better position." In thinking about this we need to first think about what "being in position" really is and what it means physically, psychologically and energetically, and *most certainly not in that order*.

How do you establish position? I would first ask at what point you "realize the need" to establish position. Awareness is the most effective weapon you will ever possess. You could spend all your years of training and without developing awareness and some ability in expanding the Shen (upper Dan Tien level expansion of the spirit or awareness), it could all be for naught. On this one point we could spend a lifetime of training. Some people have a natural ability to sense energy and others will never get it because they tend to get into their own way or "feel" that they already have it. This attitude quickly puts an end to learning about the self, as well as reading (or sensing) other's intentions.

What happens after many years of "working out" on the floor is you begin to be able to read "gross" body movement and visual cues as to what your training partner is preparing to throw your way. This type of training is more appropriate for the beginner. It helps you judge length, distance, speed and working with different partner's size, weight and power. At a certain point in training though, you should start thinking about how "you" are positioning yourself to be "more ready" to deal with the incoming force, regardless of what the attacking force is. In free work out, anything and everything should be a possibility. It's an unfortunate fact that many people never leave the "workout" mentality. You may want to be thinking about getting your hands up in position and your knees at least slightly bent to facilitate cocking the 5 bows (internally loading or cocking if you will the arms, legs and spine). This concept takes a lot of practice and proper Nei Jia (internal body) training. This is NOT something you can learn from YouTube! Presenting one side towards your attacker can also help you "get in front of the attack" rather than having the attack half way to you before you begin to position yourself for the attack. This is done casually and not aggressively as you still should be trying to hide your intentions while your attacker is making his known. This would lead us into another discussion with regards to sensing (or feeling) the intentions of others and not just by visualizing gross body language. This will be covered later in the article.

The idea of slowing down to speed up is that you shouldn't be trying to "go faster," but you should be "*thinking faster*." If you put yourself in better position sooner, then the slightest movement of your body makes all the angles of attack/defense work more to your advantage. With your faster tools (your smaller muscle hands and arms) in better position to ward off or deflect, you won't feel the need to try to quickly move your WHOLE body faster than an oncoming punch or kick or grab, etc. This type of "late" reaction will almost certainly put you out of position for any kind of "properly timed and executed" counter attack, now requiring you

to reposition yourself to be able to reach and to make good contact to any vital targets. Many times this will also cause unnecessary leaning and breaking of the body structure and connection, again requiring you to reestablish balance and structure "before" responding with input of your own. Being in balance physically and psychologically is not only crucial to being able to position yourself effectively but also to the application of effortless power that is gained through the proper use of body dynamics. We haven't even begun to speak about all the subtleties of rooting, holding, rotating and driving with the rooted legs.

Being in position is something that eventually will become natural for you, that is, if you are practicing correctly. It's that old saying, "practice makes perfect" that makes it SO hard to correct the body after years of "incorrect practice." "Perfect practice makes perfect." Your muscle memory remembers and no matter what the mouth might say, the body will react in the same manner it has been training. For instance, practicing your stances slowly with correct connection between upper and lower body and utilizing "the correct" body dynamics and positions from one stance to the next, driving from your foot bottom, controlling your delivery of energy from the "kua" and your "tan tien, meng min," moving "down and in" and not up and out, are just A FEW "perfect practice" ideas that should be burned into the muscle memory. When applying the up and down windmills to the structure mentioned above, there should be no "wash out" or breakdown of the structure of your stances. What I mean by that is, if you are taught correctly, the reeling silk effect (the coiling from the rooted foot, controlled by the waist, issued by the spine and projected outward to the extremity) will come naturally and the internal energy combined with your stance driven power will "flow" naturally and fully connected from the ground up. Again, this is something that absolutely requires hands on instruction from a qualified teacher. Reference my first article of the same name, "From the Ground Up." Similarly, your windmills should be fully expressed and reaching the structural points of proper positioning to be able to absorb and redirect incoming force. This means fully covering the circle in front of you and your arms reaching a 45° angle and following through. Attached to "correct" stance work and the rotational energy of the waist and shoulders turning, also getting your hands in a "better ready position" as mentioned earlier, will all be connected and your timed, balanced and coordinated movement will be smooth and grounded. Your windmill action (up or down) stays in front of you and it is the turning of the shoulders that establishes the proper angle or should I say a more effective angle. And it's the control of the waist that delivers the power generated by the legs upward into the torso and is expressed outwardly. Any break in this connection from the ground up to your torso and out to the extremity will cause an extreme loss of power, due to the loss of connection. Again, it is imperative to slow down while working these exercises so that you can FEEL what is happening and not just blowing through one empty movement through the next. *Refinement of movement is really what we should be striving for.*

When you move in on someone (or away), you should be in a stronger position than they are and most certainly not presenting your "soft" side. So let's discuss this for a moment. If you're standing in front of someone and you are in a full horse and they are facing you in a half horse (or any horse for that matter), you are presenting your "soft side." This is a position where you have the least balance and the least amount of reach to targets as well as proper distance for maximum penetration. The slightest movement from your opponent will negatively affect your center of balance. Even if you are shifting from 1/2 horse to 1/2 horse but still presenting your center and "soft side," you again have a weak position compared to your opponent. Even if he is

in the same position in front of you, neither have a position of advantage. I see this often with the 45, where I've even seen practitioners doing what I like to call "shuffling" or stepping their foot work up as the punch is thrown, exposing the soft side with every move, instead of moving in with the 1/2 horse and using the Tuo Bu slide steps properly. Stepping in "when necessary" into strong side stances and using the "transitional power" of the stances to drive and turn your torso to deliver deep, penetrating circular strikes to a number of more accessible targets that are now reachable due to your positioning. The undeniable increase in rotation is another bonus to proper stance positioning. Bringing someone off balance and around you needs to be done correctly with the proper coordination of shoulder rotation, leg drive and follow through for this to really be effective. Although, just adjusting where you are standing in relation to your opponent will make this type of movement noticeably more efficient. If you think of it like a clock and being able to bring someone around from 12:00 to 6:00 (180 degrees) and having them land directly in your power line or with a small adjustment to your position of entry, you're able to bring him 270-360 degrees around from 12:00 to 3:00 or all the way around back to his point of origin. These types of throws are VERY hard on the opponent causing extremely hard, damaging falls. Finish your rotation regardless of where he falls out. What I mean by this is if you take the opponent, drive and rotate bringing him around you off balance and he slams down sooner than expected (which you should expect), you MUST continue and complete your rotation, driving with your legs, bringing the opponent around and past your soft side, finishing in a strong side stance or you will stop short in an unsupported position, leaving you susceptible to being pulled down or stumbling off-balance. Like if standing on a clock, you should be practicing to be able to deliver the opponent to any main number or subsequent area of the clock that encompasses the complete circle around you, using any technique and by varying levels of drive and rotation. But always "complete" your turn so you end in the "strong side" stance. Your horse should be strong and fully expressed and your hip dropped with your shoulders rotated all the way around lined up with your power line. Like I mentioned earlier, I hear "talk" of rotation but when you watch the open workout, the actual body action falls very short of what we would call true rotation. Not just pushing or pulling the opponent around you with your arms but by turning your shoulders and driving with your legs, bringing him around your center and following through. This again comes back to perfect practice and your body responding "correctly" to the direction of the mind.

In the practice of forms, all of these ideas apply as well! Jimmy would tell me to be sure to be in class on Saturday for the forms. I now know there was a very good reason for this. Students that have trained with me know that this is something I repeat all the time. The forms will teach you timing, balance, coordination, proper use of the MANY tools you should be using, visualization of primary anatomical targets, control of your positioning with the use of proper balance control, rotation, expansion and contraction, focus of intent, breathing and the proper use of your stances (if you perform them correctly). ALL of the ideas we use in the application of the art (the San Soo) reside in the forms, if you know how to read them properly. The forms should be alive and the cadences like a drummer with changing rhythms. Your eyes and focus of intent should be VERY obvious, like a tiger stalking prey. You should never "just do" forms or have a 1-2-3-4 / 2-2-3-4 type timing. They call it shadow boxing for a reason. The forms are a means of which to issue your power and to display the style of movement that is inherent in the Tsoi-Li-Ho system. Again, this does not mean to POWER through every movement with no true expression of the expansion, contraction and extension of certain movements. Remembering that you will respond in the same way you train, you need to train your forms with the same

focus on proper positioning, timing and use of your stances. This means not recoiling to strike or going the wrong way before blocking, leading with your head, disconnecting your structure, etc. Some movements can be made flashy or more visual for demonstrative purposes but NEVER FORGET YOUR INTENT. This obviously applies in weapon forms as well. If your stances are not strong and clean and your body fully connected, then the weapon will move you instead of you performing and controlling the weapon. Adding an extension to your body, (whatever the weapon) will magnify any errors in stance and or body connectivity. I've had people tell me, "I've got it here in my legs but I just can't get it to transfer to the weapon." Truth be told, if you can't transfer it to your extremity, the problem lies in your body and the strength of the connection from your legs to your torso as well as the ability to time and coordinate your upper and lower body movements. The perfect practice principles apply here and the basics (that are really not basic) need to be refined and this can be very hard for the "seasoned" practitioner. The reason for this will be discussed later in the article.

Being psychologically in position is not something that is obvious to even the trained eye. This level of positioning relies solely on the level of your situational awareness and your martial mindset. Your physical body could be in an adverse position but if your awareness is intact and you can "perceive" the situation changing or danger closing, you can make small unnoticed and nonthreatening adjustments to your situation to put yourself into a more favorable position. This can either be for a defensive position or positioning yourself for any kind of offensively defensive action. Anyone seeking to develop a martial mindset should learn what an offensively defensive action is. Offense is truly defense at a higher level of "perception." When walking through a group of people, the simple act of scratching your ear or even your anterior deltoid (shoulder) can put your hands in better position to react to a threat. You should be able to do all of this without threatening the people around you. Again, this begins with psychological positioning and the ability to put yourself in a position of advantage. Have you ever been speaking with someone or a group of people and simply because one or more change their position, you find yourself adjusting your own position? When you eat out, do you scan the room for entrances and exits and position yourself so that you sit to face these? There are many types of self-defense. What about a fire or serious natural disaster? You may be able to direct your loved ones to safety and possibly help others if you are aware of these things. You can give yourself a slight advantage by having your "mind" in the right frame of mind. Look in the windows next to you or occasionally stop to smell the roses as you look around to access the area. Remember to be aware of your surroundings at all times. This is NOT paranoia; it is awareness that takes you out of the category of prey. Predators notice this kind of awareness and usually this is not what they're looking for. After decades of training, I don't even think about it anymore. It ends up being just what you do, automatically. The amount of trouble you avoid is well worth it, because the reality is, to confront is always the lesser, more negative path. And again, psychologically you are in position while your body is mostly out of "ready" position.

Jimmy would say to me as a kid, "If you can't work out, think about it." This doesn't mean to constantly be in a state of fight or flight but just that you can train your mind to visualize doing what may need to be done to protect yourself and your loved ones. The hard reality is that if you can't visualize doing extremely violent things to someone that would do them to you, you most likely (situation becoming reality) will become the victim and those same violent things

could happen to you. Anything and everything YOU think you can do to someone, you need to remember they can do all that to you as well. "It might not be your day."

In all documented warfare strategy, positioning (politically and geographically) is primary. Flanking, ambushing, guerilla tactics, and many more all play a major role. Do you not think that these play a role in personal self-defense? "Lure The Tiger Out of the Mountains" is the title of a book written by Gao Yuan (Simon Schuster, 1991) covering the 36 stratagems of ancient China. These stratagems are effective enough that they are used in business today. One thing to remember is that others will try to "lure" you into "their" comfort zone. If you can be psychologically in position and able to negotiate (whether to gain position or lure them in), you have the same opportunity to bring them into your zone. Deciding to play someone else's game is always that, a decision. And for some it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I will often tell students, "regardless of what art you choose, you're either in structure and connected or you're not." This may seem a bit meaningless to some but I assure you, not everyone is privy to the closed door type training that is needed to truly change your body structure nor has the years of repetitious inner body exercises been done to solidify this type of 9-pearl connection. I still hear people talk about this art or that art being better than this or that system and I just smile. It becomes apparent to anyone that has a deeper understanding of real martial art that ALL systems are good. They all use similar techniques; it's how those techniques are used that makes them different. It's YOU that makes it effective or not. We have been conditioned since childhood to see the differences in all things rather than the similarities. I won't get philosophical about this but think about it. It's the get in (or put you in) that box and stay there mentality. This is what unsophisticated and emotionally based judgment does to what could be acquired knowledge. After 39 years of training and study, I have come to see the similarities more than the differences in martial practice. I see it as "good" kung fu or "bad" Kung Fu.

Even if you are "working out" and not "training" you still need to get past the ego driven "workout" mentality. Understand that "you" control your training or your "workout". Your partner can be trying to be as vicious and sloppily fast, hard and violent as they want but only you control how you respond to this energy. Jimmy used to say this to me as well, "If this easy, everybody would be good. This not easy." Just like dance or any type of professional level sport, there are levels of achievement that each "individual" strives for. "Be a smart fighter young man, learn to use yourself not just be a lesson fighter." This still goes back to the reality of the studio workout mentality verses the allowing of your mind and body to respond to the higher level intuitive response that is fed by your awareness. Part of advancing yourself is being "in control" of your response and not falling prey to the typical reaction of allowing someone else to dictate the speed and pace of "your" training. So slow down, coordinate and time your response to speed up. Quick and jerky type moves are preceded by a stop and then followed by a stop or a jerk, unless it is coordinated and timed with the movement starting from the ground up and through the structure and ending at the contact point (9-pearl).

Try to avoid allowing ideas like, "just hit him harder" or "go faster and it will work" or "I'll just change it to MAKE it work." We've all had these ideas at one point but there is a very large problem with this thought process.

Fact: If you hit him harder in a training session it will most likely work better. But does this achieve a goal in "training?" It all works exactly as it should when done for real and good contact is made. Usually though, when trying to hit harder, most people put themselves out of position. When that extra contact is made on you, you need to control the "urge" to want to give it back with interest. As discussed above, a controlled, well-timed response with good leverage and a perfectly applied throw that directs your opponent to the ground followed by a controlled well-placed and targeted follow-up puts much more back to him than "trying" to prove you can hit harder. Just "good contact" made to the proper target using the proper tool is all that is needed. Also, part of learning is to learn what reaction the body will have to input. So some contact is necessary at some point but excessive contact early on with beginners is only going to create a useless workout partner that becomes gun-shy and or an injured partner that can no longer train. Going too fast and too hard will obviously create hard contact. If proper control is used, a minimum amount of contact will occur.

Jimmy used to "train" reaction and explain it. A good way to think about it or even to actually apply this is to use a needle. Poke any area of the body and you'll get a very realistic reaction to the input. Proper understanding of how the body reacts is extremely important on both sides of the spectrum. For you, having an understanding of where the attacker's body is going to be positioned for the next strike, throw or whatever you decide to do as well as how to help your attacker present vital targets for your follow-up can be very helpful. From the other side of it, you learn to react properly not only to provide a good training partner that is loaning out his or her body but also to learn to move with and absorb energy rather than standing firm and "sucking it up" if you will. This is why it is always better to take their balance so you are striking to vital areas or throwing them to the ground so "it" can strike them, while the attacker is trying to regain balance and not able to absorb or defensively move with your input. As you gain control (or at least you should) you can begin adjusting your targeting and/or your input to their body (that you learn by slowing down) to "help" your partner into the position you want them in by using proper body mechanics and not going harder and faster, and at the same time resisting the need to "prove" to yourself (and your training partner) that you can make it work, possibly injuring them seriously.

Fact: If you go "faster" on a technique it will work. MAYBE....

The REAL fact is, when you go faster, you go sloppier and are almost certainly off balance, which equates to less effectiveness and a massive loss of true effortless power. It's amazing to me that few things are being done with proper technique. If you are working out far too fast and making a lot of contact and you and or your opponent are still able to work-out, it means that nothing is being done with the proper technique. If you strike and make contact on a vital target or if a "proper leverage" technique is done with intent and JUST A LITTLE too fast, your partner will in fact be damaged severely. Because when you slow down you are actually able to train proper targeting, proper leverage angles, correct throwing, and proper use of tools, proper timing-balance-coordination as well as positioning, rotation, leg drive and true effortless power through use of proper body dynamics. Besides, putting yourself in better position leaves you far less distance to the target and as long as you are using proper dynamics, you don't need to try to hit him harder and faster. The coil is already in place and there is no need to recoil and go out of position and increase the distance to your target area. The full power of your body being driven by the large leg and torso muscles will be transmitted to the target area. The timing and

coordination of the movements gives the illusion (but actually reality) of greatly increased speed. The truth is, slowing down to speed up doesn't mean you move slowly, slowing down allows you to develop the timing and coordination necessary for the moves to flow better and the total time is much less (or faster). Master Jack Sera would tell us, "Don't move faster. Think faster!" After training "correctly" for many years, your body will respond faster and with much more connected structure (and proper position) to the input from the mind. This will eventually apply even to a startled response. This is more like a twitch response. The targeting, timing and coordination you build through slowly training proper technique will all release, virtually with no thought. Jimmy would say to us, "by the time my mind says to hit him, it's already done." At this level it's a really bad situation to be accidentally startled by a friend or loved one. Always try to look before you release. Of course, this also depends on location and situation.

Fact: Changing techniques to "make" them work is part of learning to go beyond being a lesson fighter. Again, there is a problem with this thought process, especially from an advanced level. For beginners it is crucial to learn proper technique: proper angle of attack, proper leverage angles as well as applying proper positioning and timing, balance, coordination and all the many more things that eventually create, or should I say develop San Soo in a student and their true expression of Tsoi Li Ho Fut Hung Ga. As a more advanced student or even the honorary title of Master, unless you've stopped learning, you should (just as any other student) be able to execute any given technique properly and without having to "change it to make it work." If and when you are able to execute the proper technique and understand the dynamics and as Jimmy would say, "the key" to the movement, only then should you begin to use it. What is meant by that is flowing from one idea to another seamlessly. This also goes back to the idea of hitting them harder and going faster to make it work. If you understand the concepts and how to move and hold someone off balance as well as keeping a favorable position to your attacker, then moving from one "correctly done" technique to another (at a higher level of training) is what you are striving for.

Energetically speaking, how often do you listen to your energy, intuition, and your gut, whatever you want to call it? Have you felt someone looking at you or had someone enter a room and all of a sudden the energy and "vibe" if you will changes dramatically? This is vibrational energy being picked up (almost like radar) from the expansion of the thoughts or intention of this individual or group of individuals. Like your voice sending audible vibration to the ear, it's quite invisible but yet can cause an indoor wind chime to hum from a shout across a room. Thoughts ARE vibrations sent outward to the void. This can be a positive thing if you are the type of person that enters a room with loving energy and compassion that attracts good people to you rather than having this expansion of energy push everything away from you or worse yet, attract hateful, angry and destructive energies to yourself! With meditative and Qi Gong type practices, these sensitive energies can be enhanced and your abilities to "feel" or "sense" energies can become a large part of your martial awareness. This sensitive energy that you can develop through practice will lend itself to many aspects of an encounter. Not just at the higher level of sensing or feeling with the expanding of the awareness, but it can also enhance your ability to sense and feel someone's (as well as your own) balance points and/or center of balance. Also, in speaking of vibration, fast frenzied action and thought, truly demonstrates a very slow vibrational pattern. On the other hand, a calm meditative state resonates at an incredibly fast vibrational pattern.

Like any esoteric endeavor, this type of training needs constant monitoring with quality instruction. There are NO shortcuts to any quality training even though we now live in a world where satisfaction with small achievement is the norm. This is not meant as an insult to people striving to achieve, just a reminder that the "ego" and your inner self are the worst enemy you will ever encounter. Until you "die of the self" and begin learning about your "true self," you can never be better than your own ego.

"Never get too cocky about what you know, because you don't know it all." Quote from my late brother in law on my wife's side, Dennis Lunetta (a very wise and kind man). Striving to better yourself will be what keeps you learning and to quote one more very wise man, Dr. Wayne Dyer, "true nobility is not being better than anyone else, it's being better today than you were yesterday."

Though you may hold a certificate, degree or honorary title, to not be open to continued learning shows a true lack of humility and respect, the respect you should have for others and your own self-respect. Worse than that, the need to judge others and point out their deficiencies may reflect a rigid mindset, insecurity, lack of compassion, the distorted belief that the only way to achieve is by others failing, or any combination of these. This is a time to question your own motivations and take a good "hard" look at yourself. Remember that judgment does not define the judged, it only defines you as someone needing to judge others to try to make yourself feel better or to appear more knowledgeable. Although imitation is a true form of flattery, it does not eliminate the need for self-evaluation.

The reason these psychological ideas are brought forth is that it is my sincere knowing that to be able to reach a point in your training where *you are "able" to slow down to speed up*, you first must conquer yourself and the self's "need" to be better than anyone else. The "Warrior, Healer, Scholar, Priest" progression is very real, though some may deem it too "philosophical." Then, by virtue of that judgment, they will miss the fact that they have not progressed beyond the "Warrior" level of martial practice. This is FIRST level training and each level feeds off of and increases the quality of the one that precedes it. Think hard about this and it becomes extremely clear why this is true and "The ultimate goal is perfection of the self and not the conquering of others."

*"The art of Kung Fu lies not in victory or defeat, but in the building of human character."*  
Jimmy H. Woo (Chen, Sui Dek)



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**Revised April 15, 2014**