

Lessons in Mindfulness



Supporting the practice of serious martial artists

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Body, Mind, and Spirit

*The study of martial arts is a path of personal growth, encompassing body, mind and spirit. **The Lessons in Mindfulness** program is designed to support and supplement your physical practice, to motivate you and inspire you on ever deeper levels.*

**To know oneself
is to study
oneself in action
with another
person.**

—Bruce Lee

Topic

Partners, Not Opponents

The words we use are very important. Words are the tools that convey thoughts and feelings to others. Some words can be interchanged without affecting the intent of the message. ‘Partner’ and ‘opponent’ can both be used to describe the relationship between two people who practice martial arts together, but their meanings are vastly different. The term you choose, ‘partner’ or ‘opponent’, reveals your attitude and fundamentally shapes your approach to practice.

Opponents in Practice

What comes to mind when you hear the word ‘opponent’? You might think of victory and defeat, winning and losing, or keeping score. ‘Competitor’, ‘rival’, or even ‘enemy’ also come to mind. Imagine a dojo where everyone adopts an ‘opponent’ attitude. In every class, people pair up, and try to beat the stew out of each other. Each tries to throw harder and faster techniques, and the sparring is intensely aggressive. ‘Aggressive’ is the key word here. An opponent mentality promotes rivalry in practice. Most surely, the environment is split, and not down the middle. Very few people can handle such a tough challenge or thrive on this level of competition. The strong take advantage of the weak. Injuries are frequent and severe. The majority will quit early in their practice, never realizing how martial arts could have changed their lives.

Adapting an opponent attitude is futile—your struggle is always with yourself

Opponents in Life

Maybe you're thinking, "Only the strong survive." But is the goal to survive, or is it to grow and use the practice to evolve? With an adversarial attitude, the only thing growing is the competitor's ego. This mind-set migrates into everyday life. In defense, you could say that a person who takes on the world by storm usually accomplishes a lot. In reality, they are often over stressed, tend to be perfectionists, and are sadly unfulfilled. They overlook their successes, because they are too busy trying to conquer the next frontier. They focus on the next trophy, the next relationship, degree, job, or bigger house. They seem to always be pushing themselves, fearful that someone will catch up. At the end of life, despite a long list of accomplishments, they are still not satisfied. Happiness and contentment, obtained only through inner peace, remains elusive until the end. The earlier in our life we learn this concept, the better: Adapting an opponent attitude is futile—your struggle is always with yourself.

Partners in Practice

A great martial artist said, "If you are only concerned with victory and defeat, you are a narrow minded and selfish individual." Think of the difference in your practice, when you view the other students as your 'partners.' Your potential, and that of your partner, is virtually unlimited. A good partner is just as—or even more—concerned for the progress of the other person. As you practice, no longer is every man out for himself, or one person pitted against all the rest. Instead, each person works on his own skills, while helping the other students to improve theirs. The environment becomes one of increasing progress—a partnership—rather than a mindset of kill or be killed.

If you are only concerned with victory and defeat, you are a narrow-minded and selfish individual.

Softness triumphs over hardness, feebleness over strength. What is more malleable is always superior over that which is immovable. This is the principle of controlling things by going along with them, of mastery through adaptation.
—Lao-tzu

The power of practicing with a partner

A great partner is like a chameleon. He has the sensitivity to recognize the skill level of the other person, and sets his level of intensity at, or just above, that of his partner's. At all times, he encourages his partner to work towards his greatest potential.

Some might fear that by practicing with this attitude, they will lose their competitive edge, which they believe pushes them to practice hard. On the contrary, pushing and challenging each other should be vigorous and exciting. As you build greater trust, the practice will become more intense. This allows everyone to work on their weakest as well as their strongest techniques. Skill levels of both partners, and enjoyment of practice grows in every class.

Senior students recognize that partnering with beginners gives them a chance to correct poor technique. They also get to practice against techniques that aren't as clean, straight and crisp, perhaps more like a real confrontation on the street. When senior students work together, they can practice advanced techniques with speed and power, because they have developed control and trust.

Be a better partner at home and at work

Taking this concept into your everyday life will dramatically affect your personal and professional relationships. At all times, try being a partner at home, rather than an opponent. Your family life will be happier and more rewarding. Remember the saying. "Would you rather be right, or happy?" Often ask yourself, "What can I do to help?" Try not to harbor resentment or feel victimized.

You will become a better partner, and everyone in your home will be happier. At the office, this concept can turn salesmen into trusted advisors. Your new facilitating role could lead to more and much larger sales. Your clients will feel like they are in a win/win situation. Nobody feels as if they've been cheated, and your clients will want to return to you again and again. Remember, both in and outside of the dojo, everyone wants to work with a great partner. So develop your sensitivity and partner skills.

Whatever the service or product might be, customers want to do business with people that they like. Always strive to be a partner, helping wherever you can. Be a problem solver, and you will be successful.

A business owner, plagued by lagging sales figures and negative employee attitudes, hired a consultant to bring new energy into the company. The consultant quickly realized that the cause of most of the problems related to the pay structure of the sales people. They were forced to compete against each other, rather than working for the good of the company. The cutthroat attitudes made life at the office almost unbearable. He suggested that the owner not only restructure the sales department, but implement a bold new bonus plan to inspire greater teamwork. At the end of the year, each salesperson would receive a five thousand dollar award to be passed along to the co-worker who helped him the most in the past year. The sales department embraced the new idea with enthusiasm. With inside competition eliminated, people worked happily on their assigned accounts, and the environment became quite pleasant.

**Do every act
of your life as if
it were your last.**

—Marcus Aurelius

One salesman, Trevor, seemed to thrive in this atmosphere. He had always enjoyed selling and often attended outside sales training courses to improve his techniques. When a technique worked well for him, he shared it with others in the office. He generated many leads, sometimes more than he could handle in a timely manner, so he passed along extras to the other sales people. Although he lost some commissions, he felt that a happy client was better for the company. His friendly attitude was infectious, both inside and outside of the office walls.

At the end of the year, the company's sales figures were at the highest levels ever. The happy owner distributed the five thousand dollar bonuses. As agreed, the co-workers began passing the special awards along to those who had helped them the most. To his astonishment, Trevor received 80% of the special awards. Although he had missed a few commissions, he had the best year of his career.

Whatever the service or product might be, customers want to do business with people that they like. Always strive to be a partner, helping wherever you can. Be a problem solver, and you will be successful.

**It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life
that no man can sincerely try to help another without
helping himself.**

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Activity

Describe in detail two situations, one at home and one at work, where you acted like an opponent. Then, explain how you could have handled these moments as a partner. Write at least a paragraph on each.

When you have completed this activity, keep a copy of your work for future reference, and make a copy to turn in to your instructor.

**All wrong-doing arises
because of mind. If mind
is transformed can
wrong-doing remain?**

–Buddha

Technique: **Tension and Relaxation with Breath**

- To begin this technique, lie flat on your back, keeping your eyes closed, palms up with the back of your hands on the ground. Take three deep breaths and then exhale completely.
- As you inhale, gradually tense your left foot throughout the breath. In the beginning of the inhalation, the tension should be slight, in the middle of the inhalation, the tension should be 50% and at the end of the inhalation, (with the breath fully in) your left foot should be vibrating with complete tension. Hold the tension and your breath for just a moment, and then slowly exhale. Concentrate on relaxing the foot 50% at the halfway point of the exhalation, and completely relaxed as the breath is fully exhaled. The tensing and relaxing should follow the inhalations and exhalations.
- After completing the left foot, repeat the same process with the right foot. Next, move up to the left calf and then the right calf. Continue higher to the left thigh, then the right thigh. Move to the left buttock and then the right buttock. Shift up to the lower abdomen, then the upper abdomen; the left chest area, and then the right chest area. Continuing, focus on the left upper arm, and then right upper arm. Then move to the left forearm and hand, then the right forearm and hand. Go to the neck and finally the face.

NOTE: Once you've memorized the sequence for this technique, the exercise should only take 3-7 minutes from start to finish. Practice for several months.

**For the uncontrolled
there is no wisdom,
nor for the
uncontrolled is there
the power of
concentration and
for him without
concentration there is
no peace. And for the
unpeaceful, how can
there be happiness?**

—Bhagavad Gita

If you think strength is the most important factor in martial arts, you will never become strong.

—Kensho Furuya

- After moving through the whole body, tensing and relaxing, breathe out deeply. Then, inhale and draw a wave of tension from your feet, calves, thighs and buttocks, abs, chest, arms and face, up through your whole body on the inhalation. Hold for a moment with complete tension throughout the whole body. Exhale and let a wave of relaxation starting at the head, sweep down to the feet. Repeat 3-5 times.

Key points to remember

- Do not practice this technique right after eating. Wait at least one hour.
- The breath must lead the tension and relaxation of the body.
- Although challenging in the beginning, concentrate on isolating the specific body part that is being tensed and relaxed. Do not involve the other connected parts. Tense and relax only the part that you are working on at that moment.

Benefits

This exercise reduces your stress. It helps link the physical body with the breath. Through the practice of this technique you will find yourself able to go into a deeper state of relaxation.

Glossary

Chi (Chinese) Ki (Japanese)

These terms are synonymous and refer to vital life force energy. Chinese medicine and philosophy are often based around the flow of chi, such as acupuncture, Chinese massage and traditional Chinese medicine. A popular example of this energy occurs in the Star Wars trilogy as the force. In Asia, a common belief is that we have individual ki and also universal ki. A great martial artist once said, “The goal of martial arts is to unite one’s personal ki with the universal ki.”

Now/ “In the moment”

On the surface, now or “in the moment” seems to represent a period of time. In contrast we have the past and the future. So, now is this moment. The term now or in the moment, is a reference to consciousness or complete awareness of exactly where you are and what you are doing. More precisely, you are fully awake and alert and your mind does not wander. You remain focused in the moment.

**No problem can
withstand the assault
of sustained thinking.**

–Voltaire

**Learn as if you
would live forever,
live as if you would
die tomorrow.**

—Mahatma Ghandi

Recommended Reading

* *Highly recommended*

* *Barefoot Zen*—Nathaniel J. Johnson
The Empty Mirror—Janwillem van de Wetering
On the Warrior Path—Daniele Bolelli

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