

Lessons in Mindfulness



Supporting the practice of serious martial artists

Lessons in Mindfulness



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.*

When we are unable to find tranquility within ourselves, it is useless to seek it elsewhere.

—Francois de la Rochefoucauld

Topic

The Value of Peace

Our hectic society

Our hectic society is flooded with communication, information, intense entertainment, and stress. People wake early in the morning and hit the ground running, packing in as much as possible each day. Rarely getting enough sleep each night, we become caffeine junkies, supporting three-dollar habits at our corner coffee bars, or we simply push through the day trying to meet the next deadline while ignoring our physical and mental fatigue. Cell phones, e-mail, fax machines, Palm Pilots, and pagers dominate our lives. We play seemingly endless games of phone tag, and our 40-hour workweeks have expanded to over 50 hours, not to mention the countless and frustrating hours we spend each week battling traffic. We've coined the term "road rage" to describe the stress and tension that many drivers feel.

When the day finally ends, too many people gobble down fast dinners in front of the T.V. As many as 500 cable and satellite channels numb us until we finally drift off to a short night's sleep, which is abruptly ended by a loud alarm...so we can begin the same hectic cycle again. At the end of the week, our choices of entertainment and relaxation are often smoke-filled noisy bars, or the latest box office hit filled with intense themes. If we happen to miss one, our local video store is always there to catch us up on the violence, revenge, deceit, betrayal and sex we might have missed.

Constant stimulation

Children and teenagers spend hours each day listening to loud, head banging acid rock or rap music. They chat online with twenty buddies, while simultaneously surfing the internet. Bored with baseball, basketball and football, they often prefer extreme sports—sports designed for the adrenaline rush that are so dangerous, nobody would have dreamed of doing such frightening stunts 30 years ago.

What are we trying to escape?

Intense thoughts, actions, emotions and stress fill our lives. All anxiety, fear, frustration, anger and stress come from our thoughts. Vacations to “get away” from the intensity and stress for awhile appear to be the only relief. Unfortunately, the choice is often a theme park or trip designed to stimulate and excite us. What are we trying so desperately to escape? Responsibilities, duties, deadlines, pressure. Although our biggest need is to get away from thoughts and emotions, very few of us have found that release in our annual “vacations!” Stress is the hidden killer in our society. In record numbers, people visit therapists, take anti-depressants and sleeping pills, and in desperation, sometimes even commit suicide.

It is possible to reduce our stress by learning how to control the mind and breath. Slowing sensory input, calming the mind, and reacting from a state of centeredness means being actively calm and calmly active. Become mindful of each moment. Imagine how life would improve if you were always able to react from a calm and peaceful center. What if you could respond to even the most difficult or aggressive circumstance with focused peacefulness?

The difference between being bored and being peaceful is attitude and perspective.

**If you have not
committed yourself
to true emptiness,
you will never
understand
the art of peace.**

—Morihei Ueshiba

The breath and the mind are inseparable

When someone offers you a gift, and you don't accept it, to whom does the gift belong? The answer is obviously the giver. So, if someone tries to give you anger, hate or negativity of any sort, and you refuse it, you remain unaffected. Strive to be peaceful and centered, rather than reactive and impulsive. You might think, "How is it possible to remain calm and peaceful when everyone else is hurried, rude, insulting and aggressive? Life is as complicated and stressful as we allow it to be. Remember that the breath and the mind are inseparable. The condition of one directly reflects the condition of the other. Being angry, frustrated or upset is impossible, if your breath is calm, deep and relaxed. Being calm and peaceful is impossible if your breath is fast and shallow. The secret to being peaceful is to have control over thoughts. Learn to control your thoughts by learning to control your breath.

Develop a calm routine

For most people, the body and mind are naturally calm only during a subconscious state or while sleeping. However, I am suggesting that you spend time each day fully awake, building a mental habit of becoming peaceful. Start with the quieter times of your day, perhaps early in the morning, or late at night before bed. Spend time with your thoughts and feelings, practicing your breathing exercises and other techniques. Enjoy simple things such as reading inspirational works, listening to quiet music, praying or meditating. Work on controlling your breath and stilling your mind. Notice the feeling of true calmness and peacefulness, and then several times during your day strive to return to that state.

Peace and happiness can only happen in the moment. You cannot experience it in the past or in the future. So always strive to live in the now.

As you get better at manipulating your mental and emotional state, you will find that you are able to be calm and peaceful even during difficult times. The value of peace is truly priceless. It allows you to stay in control of life rather than allowing life to control you. *In short, take a minute.*

Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of calmness, no matter what the conflict.

There once were two masters. The first was an authentic sage who had truly gained control over himself, his mind, body and spirit.

The other was a self-proclaimed master who had not truly learned to control his senses, emotions and mind.

The pseudo master lived on the top of a mountain, and with the exception of a handful of students, had no contact with the outside world. He spoke often on the value and benefit of peace and of the power of serenity. He passed most of his days quiet and alone. One day, a student asked him to attend his birthday celebration in the city at the base of the mountain. The master agreed and the following day walked down the mountain and into the city. After only a few hours, the reclusive master became overwhelmed with all of the noise and activity around him and exclaimed to his students, "Get me out of here, I can't stand it any longer."

The other master had a dojo in the city. For many years, he practiced internal disciplines and had learned to control his mind, breath and vital life force energy. He had many students. One student, who had only been studying for about a year, demanded that the master teach him the next internal technique. He claimed that he had already received all possible benefit from the basic techniques, and insisted that he was ready to move to more advanced levels.

**I am searching for
that which every
man seeks—peace
and harmony
—Unknown**

The master apologized, saying that he only knew basic techniques. He further explained that the techniques he had given the student were the exact techniques he himself practiced. The student abruptly announced that he would search for a more advanced teacher. As the student was leaving, the master invited him to return in the morning and that he would take the student to the most peaceful spot that he knew. The next day the master led him to the busiest market in the city. Filled with the activity of hustling and bustling vendors and shoppers, the noise level was overwhelming to the student. The master sat down smiling and was obviously quite comfortable. He explained that he found this market to be the most peaceful place of all. The master whispered, “We should never confuse being in a peaceful place with being peaceful.”

Without peace and contentment, there can be no happiness and without happiness, life is little more than a burden.

Activity

24 Hours of Peacefulness

The path to peace is through learning to discipline the breath and mind.

Reading about peacefulness is not going to teach you its true value. To appreciate the value of peace, you must have the experience. The activity for this month is to strive to experience real peace for 24 hours. This means no talking and no entertainment, like television, radio and movies. If possible, relax and spend the day in complete solitude with little communication. Limit your activities to thinking, reading, (an inspirational, preferably non-fiction book) writing, walking, meditating, or practicing. Be completely aware of everything around you. Notice thoughts and feelings as the day passes. Be watchful and observe yourself.

If you have never attempted an activity like this, you may get frustrated, impatient, or uncomfortable. Stick with the exercise, and ask, “Why am I experiencing these feelings?” From one moment to the next, your moods may fluctuate, but breathe and enjoy the exercise. Keep a pen and paper with you to document any experiences or feelings. If your responsibilities do not allow a 24-hour commitment, take whatever amount of time is possible for the exercise. A full 24 hours is recommended. Upon completion, write a paper on your experiences and feelings about the exercise. Be mindful of how many times you instinctively tried to communicate with someone. How many times did you reach for the T.V. or radio, or anything that would break your solitude? Do not use the day for work, but to better understand the value of peace.

Keep a copy of your paper for yourself and make one for your instructor.

**The mind is never more
right than when it is at
peace with itself.**

—Unknown

Technique: Concentration on Sound

Concentration is one of the most important components of success. Everything in your life is improved with deeper concentration. All successful people have cultivated intense concentration. Concentration is the ability to focus your mind one-pointedly on any given thought or action for an extended period.

This technique will employ the sense of hearing to help deepen concentration. Choose or create a sound that is easy to hear, but not loud. Examples include running water, distant traffic, or the sound of a fan. The origin of the sound is not important, but the frequency and noise level must be consistent. The less the sound varies, the better. Running water is a good choice.

After you choose a sound, sit comfortably with your back straight, your chin parallel to the ground, eyes gently closed. Take 6-12 deep diaphragm breaths to clear the mind and then begin listening deeply to your sound. Absorb yourself into the sound. If the mind wanders to any thought other than your sound, gently bring it back. In the beginning, the mind will wander often. At first, you might find that you can keep your mind on the sound, but thoughts linked to the sound begin popping up. This is progress, but as you advance, you can concentrate on the sound without thought or judgment. An advanced student will hear the sound completely, staying in the moment and focusing only on the sound.

Key Points

- Choose a sound that has no reference to your past. If the sound you choose reminds you of a previous experience, listening without thinking of those memories will be difficult.
- Make sure that your sound is consistent, and practice daily for 10-15 minutes.
- Begin this practice in a peaceful, quiet place. Over the years, you will be able to perform this technique almost anywhere, but begin with as few distractions as possible.

Benefits

Increased focus and concentration generally leads to higher productivity, and the ability to be more creative.

**True peace
comes from being,
not having.**

Where ignorance is
our master, there is no
possibility of real peace.

—The Dalai Lama

Glossary

Sensory stimulation

A human being has five senses: Sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Sensory stimulation is when one or more of the senses are engaged. For example: Hearing music, smelling bread, or seeing colors. We primarily experience the physical world through our senses, which inspire thoughts, feelings, and emotions. To truly be peaceful and happy, we must learn to use the senses without being controlled by them.

Internal Technique

This term can be used to reference any practice or discipline which focuses on learning to control your breath, mind and vital life force energy (chi, ki.) Without this aspect of practice, you are just punching and kicking, not practicing martial arts.

Control Your Mind

This phrase actually refers to control of your thoughts, because your thoughts are the contents of your mind. To control your thoughts, you must first recognize what thoughts you are having, and then be able to choose to think about only what you want, for as long as you want, without distraction. 'Distraction' is any unwelcome thoughts entering your mind and intruding on the moment. If you have *complete* control over your mind, you are able to be in the moment—thinking or not thinking. You decide.

Recommended Reading

**Zen in the Art of Archery*, Eugen Herrigel
Peace is Every Step, Thich Nhat Hahn
Karate, The Art of Empty Self, Terrence Webster-Doyle

* *Highly recommended*

Put the thought of hitting right out of your mind. You can be a master, even if every shot does not hit.

– *Zen in the Art of Archery*

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