

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.*

All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think, we become.

—Buddha

Topic

Our Deeds Determine Us

Happiness is a choice

Happiness is determined by your attitudes, choices, and deeds. Unfortunately, most people tumble along on the waves of life...without choosing to be happy. When something good happens, they are excited and optimistic. When circumstances change and life brings difficulties, they get frustrated and angry. Tossed around between negative and positive circumstances, they suffer, helplessly waiting for the next wave of good fortune to pick them up again. In essence, they wait for “life” to make the next choice and they assume this cycle continues until they die. Most people believe happiness is elusive and beyond control, when in fact, it is always just around the corner. By consciously choosing happiness, we summon it to our doorstep.

No one to blame

Many blame others for their lot in life. Who they are, their accomplishments, or lack of accomplishments are always somebody else’s fault. Unhappy or unsuccessful people often blame bad childhoods, a lost opportunity to attend college, or the fact that they weren’t “born with a silver spoon in their mouth.” Maybe mom or dad was an alcoholic or drug addict. Sometimes, people rationalize their situation with comments like, “At least I am doing better than my friends and family.” We could list hundreds of bad beginnings and excuses for failure, and they all lead to a similar mindset: A victim mentality.

Choose your actions

Now, compare this “Oh, woe is me” syndrome to the attitudes of successful people (measuring success however you see fit.) You find a sharp contrast. Successful people take responsibility for their lives. They choose their actions. Rags to riches stories encourage everyone. We’re inspired to hear about a hometown boy who made it big, despite a difficult childhood. A story about a woman fighting her way to the top, despite many obstacles gives us all hope. Successful people share one important trait: Driving their successful actions, are positive attitudes...attitudes they have CHOSEN to adopt. Behind their mindset is an attitude of clear determination.

We become what we do, and we are what we think, so control your actions and discipline your thought, and with time enlightenment is certain.

Behaviors, attitudes, actions and thoughts

Behaviors, attitudes, actions, and thoughts shape one’s future—not circumstances, connections or luck. Our thoughts influence our attitude, our attitude guides our behavior, and our behavior determines our future...who we are and who we become. In a simple phrase, our deeds determine us. Who we are, what we think about, our habits and behaviors, are the sum total of our past choices, thoughts and actions. If we are not satisfied with our life, we only have ourselves to blame. WE are the architects of our lives. This is very important: The past does not equal the future. What we do today from this moment on molds our future.

We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men; and among those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects.

—Herman Melville

The teacher, if indeed wise, does not bid you to enter the house of their wisdom, but leads you to the threshold of your own mind.

—Kahlil Gibran

Honor the great masters

Many people reading this may ask themselves, “This is all well and good, but what does it have to do with the study of martial arts?” The answer is everything! The study of martial arts is much more than kicking and punching, getting higher rank, and losing a few pounds. It is introspection, self-examination and self-realization. To truly deserve the title of martial artist and to honor the great masters who have passed along the valuable teachings for generation after generation, we must all integrate the principles into our everyday life. It must become a discipline that we live by.

Use your will

What is the discipline? You must determine to be mindful, completely aware of what is around you as well as what is within you. Notice your thoughts and feelings all the time. Stay completely in each moment, and use your will to make the best choices, even when they are difficult ones. Do what you *should* do, especially when you don't *want* to do it. Have the courage to be honest, especially with yourself. Keep pushing to break through your mental and physical limitations. In trying to live by these ideals, you become a true martial artist.

There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at its root.

—Henry David Thoreau

The weapons of a martial artist

A martial artist can defend from any attack, external as well as internal. Attacks of negative emotions, anger, fear, frustration, moodiness, laziness, etc. are all daily battles. A martial artist is a martial artist both on and off the floor. A student, who does not apply his practice off the floor, is only a technician collecting techniques, or a customer getting a workout. To be a true student of martial arts is to take the art into everyday life. Our weapons are concentration, affirmations and visualizations, breathing techniques, meditation, reading inspirational writings, physical practice and consciously designing our life. Your future will improve by making a stronger effort today.

In practice, when you choose an attack, you choose its outcome. In life, when you choose a behavior, you choose its outcome.

Jim and Danny were senior students, and had practiced in the same dojo for several years. After bowing in to advanced class, their master told everyone, "Get your practice gear and choose a partner about your same size. Tonight we are practicing free sparring. You have been around for many years, so use good control and clean techniques."

A few moments after starting the drill, Jim clearly dominated his partner, striking hard and fast. He won the first match easily, and moved on to his second partner. Making short work of this partner as well, he moved to his third. He always used a method of "no retreat, catch the other man off guard, and stay all over him". He won the third match. Moving on to the fourth match, Jim was feeling confident and acting a little cocky. He felt that most of the other partners would be easy to beat. "After all, they just don't practice as hard as I do. My workouts are more intense," he thought.

**Never confuse
someone else's
inability to do
something with
its inability
to be done.**

—Steve Maraboli

On the other side of the floor, Danny was being pummeled. Every strike hit him, yet he still smiled. A jovial person, Danny didn't take practice or life very seriously. He never trained hard, but he was always in a good mood. After losing three matches in a row, he moved toward his final match, only to lose this one as well.

Jim's last partner was an advanced student who was strong in sparring. Right away, he landed several techniques, which caused Jim to become angry and aggressive. Jim was determined to win at all costs. In the final moments of the match, he landed a flurry of techniques and won. The master called for everyone to line up.

As they sat comfortably, he explained, "Many of you are making good progress, but I am concerned. I see two completely different perspectives of practice. Both are important, but taken to the extreme, either attitude puts you off balance.

Some of you try hard to win, no matter what it takes. Generally, these types of people have a tendency to be strong competitors and achieve much in their lives. Unfortunately, many times, they are unhappy and don't enjoy their success. Driven by a desire to always win, they see everything as a test or trial. Usually this type of person is too concerned with the opinions of others. They constantly seek approval outside of themselves. Always needing the spotlight, they have a hard time when it goes out.

The opposite perspective comes from students who have adopted a very casual attitude. 'I am just happy to be here. It doesn't matter how I am doing. I just want to have fun...no worries...everything is okay.' A person with this attitude never really pushes to achieve. He tends to be satisfied with staying in his small comfort zone, is a bit lazy, and never seems to reach his full potential.

Most people possess some of both of these attitudes. The goal is to keep them in balance. You don't want to become too competitive or too carefree. Be happy where we are, but strive to reach the next level. The truth is that our deeds determine us. Your attitude in class is a reflection of who you are in life. Learn to analyze your practice, your motivation, as well as your techniques, to understand your life better. How you spend your time determines where you end up. With the wrong attitude, you can be anywhere and still be unhappy. To put it simply, try as hard as you can at everything that you do, keeping the correct mindset throughout the process."

Achieve results, but never glory in them. Achieve results, but never boast. Achieve results, but never be proud. Achieve results, because this is the natural way.

—Lao Tzu

We work to become, not to acquire.

—Elbert Hubbard

Cooperation is as much a part of the system as competition, and the slogan "survival of the fittest" distorts this fact.

—George Soros

**Just as a picture is
drawn by an artist,
surroundings are
created by the
activities of the mind.**

—Buddha

Activity

Stories for your life

One of the best ways to learn is to use stories, anecdotes, or inspirational quotes. The activity for this lesson is to write down five of your favorite stories, anecdotes or quotes. Include a short paragraph explaining how your choices have influenced your life. Choose from any time in history, any author or resource you desire.

Keep a copy for yourself and give one to your instructor.

**Progress is impossible
without change, and
those who cannot
change their minds
cannot change anything.**

—George Bernard Shaw

Technique: Repeating affirmations

The technique for this lesson is repeating affirmations. This is one of the most powerful techniques you can practice, and is similar to visualizations or imagery. Visualizations are like videotape, with pictures and images. Affirmations are more like audiotapes, without pictures, only sound.

Is your inner dialogue constructive or destructive?

Learning to listen intently to others will help your relationships, but we also need to listen to our inner dialog or self-talk. Many of us talk much worse to ourselves than we would allow others to talk to us. These destructive thoughts often sabotage our successes.

For example, maybe you remember a comment someone made about you in the past. You still think about it, even though years have passed. Head trash like this can direct our lives. Sometimes we are not even aware of its influence. A little girl, for example, overhears her grandmother saying, “My granddaughter doesn’t look good in blue.” For the rest of her life she shies away from wearing blue. Or maybe a little boy overhears his coach describing him as, “...Not very athletic.” The boy, perhaps not consciously, makes the decision that he won’t participate in physical activities or sports. By realizing the enormous power of our own thoughts, we can re-program our self-talk, setting higher expectations, and thus change our life.

Affirm your future

You can do affirmations in two different ways. The first way is with deep concentration and attention. Sit comfortably and practice diaphragm breathing 6-12 times. Say your affirmation repeatedly. Concentrate as hard as you can, saying the phrase with conviction. The affirmation should be no more than a sentence or two. It should be positive and phrased in the present tense. For example, say, "I am healthy and strong and I feel great. I love to workout." Don't say, "I won't be fat and lazy anymore." Do say, "I am calm and peaceful, creative and inspired." Don't say, "I will stop getting so upset about my writers block." With deep attention, repeat your affirmation for a minimum of 5-10 minutes.

The second method is less formal. Throughout the day, while standing in line, stuck in traffic or just taking a break from work, repeat your affirmation over and over in the background of your mind. You won't be able to concentrate as deeply as you will with the first method, but the strength comes from the number of repetitions you are able to make throughout the day. The more you repeat the affirmation, the more powerful it becomes.

Key points

- Make your affirmation very specific.
- Practice the same affirmation for weeks or even months at a time—do not change it daily
- Keep the affirmation short, positive and in the present tense
- Affirm it with conviction. You must believe it is true.

Benefits

You are what you think about. Moods, habits and behaviors are all formed from thoughts. By controlling your thoughts, you control your deeds and take control over your life.

To practice Zen or the martial arts, you must live intensely, whole-heartedly without reserve—as if you might die in the next instant.

—Taisen Deshimaru

It is never too late to be
what you might have been.

—George Ernst

Recommended Reading

**Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*— Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki

**Jonathan Livingston Seagull*— Richard Bach

*The Art of Living Consciously:
the Power of Awareness to Transform Everyday Life*—
Nathaniel Branden

*Highly recommended

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