

# 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.*

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**Energy is neither positive nor negative; it is the mind that colors it according to our understanding.**

## **Topic** **Responding to Attacks**

Energy surrounds us. Whether we're aware of it or not, all of life is energy, from the moment of birth until the moment of death. This is a fundamental principle, acknowledged by science and religion alike. One of the great aims of martial arts lies in training ourselves to interact with the energy we face continually, every day.

First, let's look at how martial arts handles energy on a basic level of self-defense. Punches, kicks, pushes, slashes with knives, attacks with bats and bottles, virtually any physical attack you can imagine is simply energy coming at you. This physical, kinetic energy may come from clean, crisp attacks or wild, flailing attempts; it may come from one direction or from multiple angles. The direction or quality doesn't really matter; it is still energy coming at you.

Of course, before any attack is physically initiated, emotional energy must build up as well. Any attack begins first with emotional frustration and anger. Something internally or externally sets the attacker off. He is out of control, and wants to strike out, expelling energy until he can regain control. If you find yourself on the receiving end of this kind of energy, you must know how to defend yourself and your loved ones.

While there are plenty of people in our society that allow emotional issues to escalate into physical confrontations, most of us, fortunately, are not physically attacked on a regular basis. But we all recognize states of extreme frustration and anger. We have all have been provoked by

someone else, a situation, or by our own thoughts. And all of us are attacked verbally, mentally and emotionally, almost daily! These assaults are not being perpetrated by strangers lurking in dark alleys; they come from our friends and family members, our co workers and neighbors. So many people we know are stressed out by their everyday lives; emotionally, they're on the edge and ready to lash out at the slightest provocation. While these encounters may not lead to the emergency room of our local hospitals, many, many people do find themselves seeing a therapist, or filling prescriptions for mood controlling drugs, or at least questioning their own self-worth.

### Several Options in Dealing with an Attack

It's important to remember that attacks from our loved ones, in the form of words, attitudes and behaviors, are also just energy. The bottom line is, when you're confronted by physical or verbal attacks, there are only four things you can do.

Option one is that you can get hit. Obviously, this is not a good plan. Real confrontations are not like what we see in the movies or on TV. On screen, we're accustomed to elaborately choreographed fight scenes, with partners trading great looking punches and kicks, using knives and bats and broken chairs, back and forth. Actual confrontations in the real world don't happen that way. A couple of strikes, maybe a few seconds, and most fights are over.

Similarly, getting hit with verbal or emotional negative energy means that you've allowed yourself to internalize the attack and take it personally. The result is a blow to your self-esteem and then an immediate defensive posture. So you strike back with hurtful words and actions of your own,

**The components of speed are recognizing that you are being attacked, recognizing what you are being attacked with, and then taking the action necessary to neutralize or defend against it.**

**In blocking be hard and rooted. When moving be quick and light, and when harmonizing, blend with the attack.**

or you internally crumble and shut down. In either scenario, getting hit with energy is the least desirable option.

A second option when attacked is to block it. This means stopping the force head on — power against power. There are several ways to block energy physically — inside blocks, outside blocks, cross blocks etc. Blocking a strike is certainly better than getting hit, but to block effectively you must have a strong stance. Some arts call it being rooted, or having a good base, or a strong foundation. Everyone agrees that you must have a strong stance to block well.

To block mental and emotional energy, you must also adopt a strong stance. You must have a firm position that is well thought out; one that you are committed to. You cannot successfully defend your ideas and beliefs if you are willing to change them at a whim. A hard block might mean just sticking up for your beliefs and ideals. Emotionally, a good block involves listening to the other point of view without taking it too personally, regardless of how aggressive the attack is. Stay rooted and centered in your beliefs.

A third option is to get out of the way of energy. We have a saying, “The best block is don’t be there.” Physically, this consists of side stepping, pivoting, slipping, ducking, jumping or other evasive movements. This is a great option when it is done correctly. It allows you to re-position yourself, creating both a more difficult target to strike, while at the same time creating multiple openings from which you can counter. This is very valuable emotionally as well. Using this principle, you might continuously ask questions of the other person, probing their motivation and rationale. This gives you the opportunity to uncover their whole agenda, before revealing your own. We all use this technique when we change the

subject to avoid embarrassment or confrontation. We use it to avoid a conversation until a more opportune time.

### Harmonizing with Energy

The fourth option that you have when attacked — you can merge, harmonize or blend with it. This is a very difficult and advanced technique which takes great sensitivity and awareness. It's based on the concept that, in any confrontation — physical, verbal or emotional — there are three energies; your energy, their energy and the energy that you create together. The way these energies interact make up the shape of the encounter. The way these energies ebb and flow creates the atmosphere around us, every day, in every interaction, confrontational or otherwise.

By merging or blending, you take control of this interplay of energy. Some people say that this is *using their energy against them*, but that's not quite correct. *Their* energy is really only one facet of the three energies at work. If your goal is to use their energy against them, then your focus remains on only that facet, and your motivation remains one of victory and defeat. You need far too much relaxation, awareness and sensitivity to harmonize with energy, to be concerned with victory and defeat.

When you can successfully control the energy, when you can successfully control a situation, you take responsibility for yourself and for the other person. At this level of practice, you are responsible for taking them under control without hurting them, or without getting hurt yourself. The technique relies on circular rotation and re-direction. In a physical confrontation the strike is thrown and, as an extension of that energy, the attacker is thrown, locked or controlled. Understand, when you are skilled at harmonizing with and re-directing energy, your safety and your partner's

**The difference between a fighter and a martial artist is that the martial artist sees his art being implemented on and off the mats.**

**The way you respond to an attack should be based on your reason, will, the severity of the attack and your skill level in comparison to the attacker.**

safety become interrelated. The degree to which you know that the incoming negative energy cannot damage you, is exactly the degree of responsibility you have to ensure that the energy not damage your partner. In other words, *it's precisely when you're fully aware of your capability to destroy an attacker, that you have the responsibility to refrain from doing so.*

In your day to day life, this harmonizing technique manifests as being able to see the other person's point of view, being empathetic and having the skills to recognize the moment of tension and redirect it to an outcome that is positive and constructive for everyone. It means dealing with the egos of co-workers or clients in ways that advance the project or the sale without creating stress. It means taking those same old family arguments and finding creative ways to re-direct the negative energy so that you can focus on constructive relationships. In this way, you're seeing problems as the problem, rather than seeing people as the problem.

### **Many Tools in Your Arsenal**

Throughout our lives, at one time or another, we all practice these four methods of dealing with energy. Everyone has been hit (had our feelings hurt, became defensive and upset). We all have blocked (were successful in taking a stand and defending it through hell or high water). We have all avoided conversations and issues by putting them off for another day or letting them pass altogether. And everyone has taken control of a situation, by looking for the most constructive outcome, or dealing with a problem and remaining in control.

The truth is, we all need more than one defense in our arsenal. It is important to develop all four methods. Getting hit, in practice and in life, strengthens you and helps you

to realize how much you can withstand. Blocking helps you internalize and understand what you truly believe. Getting out of the way teaches us that there are some things better left unsaid, and some paths better left untraveled. And redirecting energy develops our awareness and sensitivity to others in a variety of situations.

Energy is everywhere, in all things and in all situations. It comes at us at all times, sometimes directly, sometimes unexpectedly. You can take charge of how you deal with this energy by remaining aware of what defense you are choosing. In this way, you can truly be a master of your actions and not a prisoner of your reactions.

**The essence of philosophy is that a man should so live that his happiness shall depend as little as possible on external things.**

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*In Asia, centuries ago, there was a great martial artist with thousands of students. He was known far and wide to be one of the greatest teachers of all time. One day a visitor asked the master, "Who is your best student?"*

*The master immediately thought of four students. They were Lee, Kichiro, Kim and Jiro. The master decided to put them to a test. He choose a fifth student, Truong, and put him just on the other side of a doorway. Truong was completely hidden from sight and was armed with a big, thick stick. He was told to strike the students as soon as they passed through the doorway.*

All of the art of living lies on a fine mingling of letting go and holding on.

*The master first called to Lee. Truong struck Lee without hesitation and Lee was knocked unconscious.*

*After several minutes had passed, the master called out to Kichiro. Passing through the doorway, Kichiro noticed rapid movement coming from his left side. Turning to face the attack, and just before the strike landed, he was able to block and land a reverse punch squarely in Truong's abdomen.*

*After several minutes, the master called for Kim. When Kim passed through the door, Truong swung hard at his head, as he had done with the other students. This time, Truong was thrown effortlessly across the room. This scene left both Truong and the visitor in awe, and ready to name Kim as the best student. The master just nodded and said, "Very good. Keep practicing."*

*With a wave of his hand he dismissed Kim. Several minutes later the final student to be tested was called in. Approaching the doorway, Jiro stopped abruptly and said in a firm voice, "Whoever is hiding there behind the door better come out!" A moment later a surprised Truong appeared with his weapon.*

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## Activity

### Statement of Purpose - Primary Aim

Our life is the sum total of how we spend our energy. Many people drift through life throwing energy (time, money, resources, emotions) in one direction and then another. It is often erratic and illogical. Months turn into years and years into decades. Looking back over a lifetime, too many people find that they have been a jack of all trades and haven't mastered or even dedicated very much of their lives to anything. Some people, always believing that there will be more time, will procrastinate to the very end. These people are the embodiment of the saying, "If you wait too long to discover what it is that you want to do, you will find that you have done it."

This month the activity is to develop a purpose statement or primary aim for your life. It will consist of a sentence or two that describes your deepest desires and your core values. It is the essence of what you want your life to be dedicated to and what you are most passionate about. Money, status, power, winning and possessions are not the essence of this primary aim. Don't focus on the expectations of others, or even on objectives that you want to accomplish. It is deeper than that. It truly must reflect exactly what satisfies you on the deepest level.

Be careful not to make it too spiritual; e.g. "My primary aim is to be one with God," or, "My life is dedicated to my children." Having a strong spiritual life and a wonderful family is great. Having as much professional and financial success as you like is fine, but this is not a primary aim.

**A man is not  
idle because  
he is absorbed  
in thought.  
There is a  
visible labor  
and there is an  
invisible labor.**

**First learn the  
meaning of what  
you say, and then  
speak.**

**Measure your mind's height by the shade it casts.**

**After every encounter take a moment to analyze your thoughts and actions to see if they were in line with who you want to be, and the principles that you want to live by.**

A primary aim serves as a personal and practical tool that assists you on a day to day basis. When making decisions you can measure if a choice is in line with your primary aim or not. There is not a right or a wrong primary aim. There is only what is true for you. Make sure that it is heartfelt. When you feel energy, enthusiasm, commitment, and a sense of "YES!" then you will know that you have found your real primary aim. Rarely if ever will your first draft be your final statement. Keep working on it until you are completely satisfied.

This is a very powerful technique that will help you give your life direction and meaning. It will aid in keeping you inspired and on track during confusing and difficult times.

## Reminders

### The 7 Ways to Becoming a Great Martial Artist

On the never-ending path of martial arts, it is important to remember the seven ways of becoming great in the martial arts. They never change, regardless of the style that you practice, your geographic location, or your time and place in history. It could be 1000 years ago somewhere in Asia, or 1000 years into the future in the United States, but the principles of how to become great in the martial arts remain the same.

1. You must **find a good teacher**. In martial arts there is nothing more important than the student-teacher relationship. Once the teacher is found, the student must listen. How can you call someone your teacher and then refuse to learn from them?
2. **Patience** is the next step. We have all started things full of excitement and wonder just to forsake them because of a slow beginning. Patience is not just one of the seven ways; it is something that we develop in ourselves through the practice.
3. **Perseverance** is the ability to stay the course through the rough times. It is consistency over time that truly teaches the student discipline.
4. **Practicing hard** is the backbone of martial arts. Without practice being hard physically, mentally and emotionally at times, it doesn't deserve the name martial arts. In fact, it is insulting to the generations of masters before, to not give everything that you've got in every class.

**You cannot plan for a fire as your house is burning; similarly it is too late to have your first thought of self defense as you are being attacked.**

All attacks are mental and emotional; fortunately few of them progress to physical.

5. **Practice exactly what you want to perform** is what transforms a practitioner to be a student. A student questions their technique, the application as well as the execution. Extending this principle into everyday life, the student is forced to ask the question, "Am I living the way that I want to live?"
6. **Meditation** is the foundation of the practice. To teach a student to take control over the mind is one of the most valuable skills they will ever learn. Learning to be mindful is carrying practice into every aspect of life. Life itself takes on a new dimension.
7. **Passion** teaches us that if we are not completely immersed and committed to something it may not reveal its deepest and most significant virtues. Being passionate means to fall in love with the art. It is no longer a discipline that is forced but a philosophy that is embraced. It is the never-ending path that allows you to reach your truest potential. There will be bumps in the road and dry periods in your practice, but a martial artist does whatever it takes to rekindle the excitement and enthusiasm, never risking the loss of the practice.

## Recommended Reading

**Between a Rock and a Hard Place**

Aron Ralston

**Long Walk to Freedom**

Nelson Mandela

**Books are true levelers. They give to all, who will faithfully use them.**

**Notes:**