

# 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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**Without considering the why you will never reach the where. Without understanding the aim you will surely misinterpret the what.**

## **Topic**

### **The Past, Present and Future of Martial Arts**

Few things have been as misunderstood as martial arts. From the outside looking in, the origins and early history of martial arts appears to be that of monks fighting. Because they were monks, we assume that they were practicing self defense, rather than engaged in malicious hand-to-hand combat. Many see beautiful graceful movement, others observe incredible feats of strength, and still others are impressed with power and speed beyond belief, and everyone is struck by the inner peace that these early practitioners cultivated.

It seems only logical that attempting to emulate these techniques and movements correctly will result in our achieving the same grace, speed, power and sense of peacefulness. Unfortunately, it doesn't exactly work that way. You can only imitate what you can see, and you can only emulate what you're able to grasp. We can study the physical movements of these monks; we can make our physical practice as identical as possible to their practice but, if our internal motivation and desire are different, we will almost certainly end up in a very different place. To fully understand and appreciate the original intent of martial arts, we must recognize who created it. We must understand their belief system as it related to life, death, war, peace and their place in the universe.

This is not to say that we have to adopt the belief systems of the original monks to practice martial arts. But to understand why martial arts were created, to understand the purpose of practice, **why** the practice works, **how** the practice works and **what** the practice is ultimately trying to achieve, we must take these things into consideration. Otherwise, we could just be punching and kicking. Otherwise, it's just a workout.

### **What a difference a couple hundred years can make**

The level of understanding of some students of these early practitioners was reflected later in their their own students. That is to say, a student who did not fully grasp the *why* of practice but continued practicing nonetheless, became a teacher who passed on a philosophy of practice based on their own (limited) understanding. Multiply this by several hundred years, add in poor translations, personal opinion, preferences, etc. and, after two dozen generations is it any wonder that, today, many martial arts classes appear to be little more than exercise workouts?

What began as a deeply spiritual discipline, focused on helping the practitioner become mindful and realize their oneness, has been slowly transformed, first into a fighting system, then a fitness program, and is now seen widely as a way to teach character development to children. It's true that some facets of the discipline can serve as a wonderful tool in helping to raise healthy kids. What is sad is not that martial arts is seen as something that develops kids, but rather that it is seen as something that **only** develops kids.

**We disguise ignorance, misinterpretations, poor translations and personal preference as evolution or progress, when oftentimes it is guilty of clouding the truth.**

**Martial arts are a spiritual discipline disguised as a physical activity.**

### **Martial arts is misunderstood**

So here's the mystery: why would a group of Chinese monks — striving to achieve enlightenment, a closer connection with the Divine — develop a system of physical techniques that could be interpreted as fighting or exercise? We know that there has been a tradition of meditation among monastics of all cultures for many centuries. What purpose did **these** monks have in connecting their ongoing meditation to a physical discipline? In seeking answers to these questions, we are led to the unavoidable conclusion that real martial arts is much more than meets the eye. Real martial arts is a complete and integrated philosophical system, involving development of the body, mind and spirit. Vic Tanny can give you a good workout. The Marines can teach you to defend yourself effectively. Scouting will teach kids character development. None of these involve much complex philosophy. Martial arts is different. Martial arts was developed specifically to help people take control of their lives.

### **Lessons in Mindfulness**

Over the past two years you have been exposed, through *Lessons in Mindfulness*, to some of the deepest philosophical aspects of the martial arts. The reason that these lessons are applicable to all students, no matter what style or art they practice, is precisely because they deal with the original intent of practice.

If you have been practicing the internal techniques, the breathing exercises, visualizations, affirmations and have been meditating regularly, you have experienced, first-hand, a greater control over your mind. If you have completed each

activity, you surely are more introspective than you were, and place much more value on time and life itself.

Many of the topics of these lessons, activities and techniques can be traced back hundreds if not thousands of years. Others are modern applications of ancient principles and teachings. Our aim throughout has been to educate and inspire the practitioner to gain greater control over their breath, learn to discipline and still their mind, learn to feel and manipulate chi (ki). We have strived to make our intention the same as our ancient masters.

### **Masters everywhere**

Here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have the opportunity to observe and learn from authentic practitioners that have dedicated their life to the study and practice of their art; they deserve our gratitude, respect and support. Yet we also see too many strip-mall masters that strive merely to grow their organizations and their businesses while barely understanding their art. It's so easy to take weekend seminars, collect certifications and then offer a smorgasbord of disciplines to a wide-eyed and impressionable public. It's even easier to go online and access information about any discipline with a click of a button. It seems like anyone with an opinion and a fast internet connection can be an expert overnight. And so we see "schools" offering *Karate-Hapkido-Taibo-Kickboxing-Kung Fu-Aikido-Brazilian Jujitsu*. The claim is that you can learn anything and almost everything at the same time.

Don't believe the hype. Don't believe everything you read or are told about martial arts. Be an open-minded skeptic — open-minded enough that you are willing to listen to new

**There are new styles and programs emerging everyday and this will surely continue into the future, but real martial arts has little to do with gimmicks or fads. It is an ancient philosophy that we should pray outlives them all.**

**Martial arts has been the best kept secret for long enough. Not to share something this great with others is selfish.**

thoughts and ideas, but skeptical enough that you don't buy into everything that is promoted. Remember, no one has ever achieved anything simply by talking about it, or by jumping from one discipline to another. To make progress you must do the work, and this means getting on the mats and practicing. Through *Lessons in Mindfulness*, you have been exposed to ideas, philosophies and truths that even some of the highest ranking teachers have never been taught. There is a saying, "Once you know the truth, you can never go back."

### **Use the gift**

And the future of martial arts? That, dear reader, is up to you. It does not matter how many people say that gravity does not exist. Similarly, it does not matter how many teachers and schools refuse to teach the deeper philosophical truths that underlie the martial arts. You have been exposed to them! If you continue to practice while embracing this philosophy it will not die. And your life will change.

Those old monks, centuries ago, developed an amazing discipline which has come to be called "martial arts." Their vision and understanding went deep to the core of meditative awareness and spiritual contemplation, and they came away with the foundations of an art that allows us conscious control of even the most mundane aspects of our lives. When we are able to truly use this discipline, we become masters of our actions rather than prisoners of our reactions. In many ways, this was one of the greatest philosophical breakthroughs in human history. And still, so many people outside and inside martial arts see it as a competitive sport, as a game, as combat, as child care, as exercise.

Martial arts gives us a means to forever link the inner meditative spirit to the outer, holistic world. It remains a tremendous gift, and the greatest thanks we can offer for this gift is to use it, evolve with it. Whatever your art, whatever your practice, practice with mindfulness. This means to be aware, to Be Here Now.

Remember always that we are mind, body and spirit and that martial arts —true martial arts — must always encompass mind, body and spirit.

**There are only really two levels within martial arts—discovery of the ego and destruction of the ego.**

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*There are hundreds of thousands of stories throughout history of people and their transformation through the study and practice of martial arts.*

*Many of them began with feeble and weak bodies. With time they developed into healthy and strong practitioners. Others were clumsy, with poor self esteem, and they gradually became confident, coordinated individuals. Some of the stories involve out of shape, victimized people that became fit fighters, while other stories address undisciplined, uncontrolled minds that became concentrated and focused. Still others are stories of people who were just in search of a fun, new activity who ended up falling in love with a deep and ancient philosophy. The one thread that links all of these*

**The more important something is to us, the more we think and talk about it. How much do you think and talk about martial arts?**

*stories together is the passion these people developed for this life-changing practice called the martial arts.*

*Rather than sharing a story this month, sit down with paper and pen and describe in detail how your life has been affected thus far by the study of martial arts.*

*Write down how you believe that your life will be affected in the next 5, 10, 15 or 20 years. Just imagine where you will be if you don't quit and you continue to practice using the same philosophy and with the same or greater intensity.*

*You have heard stories about great masters from the past. You are exposed to the martial arts of the present, but never forget — you and your fellow students are the future of martial arts. The greatest story is yet to be written. It is the personal and continuous transformation that is happening to you.*

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**If everyone quit when it became hard, it wouldn't be long before martial arts disappeared completely.**

## **Activity**

### **Discover what you really value**

In this Lesson the past, present and future of martial arts has been studied. Whether it is martial arts or your life, it is popular and convenient to divide it up into these three sections. We have all heard that you can only “live in the moment” and while this is true, we also have heard that, “if we don’t learn from history we are doomed to repeat it.” It also needs to be said that, “The past does not equal the future.” It is the choices that we make today that will influence our tomorrows.

Many people when asked the question, “What are the most important things in your life?” respond quickly with, “God, family, health and friends.” The top five answers to this question are virtually universal.

The activity this month is to discover what you really value and if your life is in line with what you profess. While there may be many measurements and resources in examining your life, there are few more powerful and revealing than time and money. If possible, gather

**Have you practiced  
your techniques,  
stretched and  
meditated TODAY?**

**Time is life and life is made up of time. How are you using yours?**

your checkbook register, credit card statements, cash receipts, or any records of overall expenditures for the last three years. No, you are not being audited by the IRS, but more of a personal audit. Let's discover where you spend your money. For this exercise you only need one other document. It is your calendar, or day planner. Whether it be a Black Berry or a palm pilot, or just a calendar on the refrigerator. Pull together the last three years, (or at least one year!) and audit your time and money. These documents help to expose us to ourselves. Remember that what you have spent money and time on in the past is more than likely what you will spend time and money on in the future without a conscious effort.

Do you like what you see?

## Reminders

### Review of Topics and Techniques

*This month the Reminder is an overall look at the topics and techniques of Module One and Module Two. It is suggested that you go back periodically and study the individual Lessons. One exposure to new ways of moving and thinking is not enough. It is the repetition that causes lasting change.*

#### MODULE ONE - LESSON ONE

### Sharing the Art- The Student Teacher Relationship

Few things are more precious than the student/ teacher relationship. It is impossible to learn the art without a teacher. Take care never to cross the line, do not become too friendly, remember that familiarity often breeds disrespect. Hold your teacher in high regard, but do not put them on a pedestal. If you do, when they fall off, your respect for the art tumbles with them.

#### Technique

**DIAPHRAGM BREATHING** is a technique designed to re-educate the body in how to breathe deeply and correctly. It oxygenates the bloodstream and prepares the practitioner for deep meditation.

#### MODULE ONE - LESSON TWO

### Achieving Mastery

The seven ways of becoming a great martial artist; Find a good teacher, Patience, Perseverance, Practice Hard, Practice exactly what you want to perform, Meditate and Have Passion.

#### Technique

**TRIANGULAR BREATHING** helps to equalize the breath.

**MODULE ONE - LESSON THREE****Partners Not Opponents**

*Partners, not Opponents* refer to your attitude and motivation for practice, not the intensity with which you practice. The deepest goal of martial arts is to help the practitioner realize Oneness. Maintaining the attitude of opponents makes it impossible to achieve this.

**Technique**

**TENSION AND RELAXATION** exercises help the practitioner learn to fully relax and fully tense the body. Learning to isolate individual body parts increases concentration and control.

**MODULE ONE - LESSON FOUR****Breaking Through Your Limitations**

This concept demands that the student look at their practice and life on all levels. Never become satisfied, constantly push to reach your potential.

**Technique**

**SLOWING THE BREATH** teaches the practitioner how to elongate the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. It promotes peacefulness, relieves stress and aids in health and longevity.

**MODULE ONE - LESSON FIVE****Do What You Can Do Perfectly**

One of the best ways to get to the next level is to do what you already can do *perfectly*. This means that in every area of your life, if you know what should be done, and how it should be done, then just *do it!*

**Technique**

**WATCHING YOUR THOUGHTS** asks the question, “If you are watching the thoughts, then who is having the thoughts? And, why, when I watch the thoughts, do they slow down?”

**MODULE ONE - LESSON SIX****The Power of Thought**

Our mind is one of the most powerful things in the universe. To harness its power, we simply need to learn to control and discipline our thoughts. Your thoughts determine your actions and your actions determine your future. It is the duty of a martial artist not only to develop physical skills, but to learn to discipline the mind.

**Technique**

**VISUALIZATION** is a powerful technique to help you create your future. Your brain cannot tell the difference between what is seen with your eyes, and the picture you manifest in your mind. It responds to both equally.

**MODULE ONE - LESSON SEVEN****The Value of Peace**

In a world filled with stimulation, billion dollar empires such as Disney World and Las Vegas are where people go to relax. More people than ever are on medication for stress and anxiety. We have all but forgotten the value of quiet contemplation, meditation and silence.

**Technique**

**CONCENTRATION ON SOUND** helps the practitioner develop focus and concentration that generally leads to higher productivity and the ability to be more creative.

**MODULE ONE - LESSON EIGHT****Our Deeds determine us**

You are not what you think you are. You are not what the world thinks you are. But you are *where* you are because of your thoughts, behaviors and actions. Have you ever found yourself asking the question, “Why did this happen to me?” If you like the results you are getting, you should keep doing what you are doing. To get to a different place, you are going to have to change course.

**Technique**

**AFFIRMATIONS** - You are what you think about. Moods, habits and behaviors are all formed from thoughts. When you can control your thoughts, you control your actions and take control over your life.

**MODULE ONE - LESSON NINE****Balance through Discipline**

Each day, week or month there are many things competing for your time and energy. Most people address the issue with the theory that the squeaky wheel gets the oil. Days are frequently spent with a fire extinguisher in hand. This Lesson focuses on examining your life and learning to place your energy in the areas that need the most attention. Being disciplined will create and maintain a balanced life.

**Technique**

**WALL GAZING** - By practicing this technique often you will improve your ability to keep the mind from wandering to any thought other than your point of focus, and gain the strengthened ability to concentrate on a task, job or project for longer periods of time.

**MODULE ONE - LESSON TEN****When are You a Martial Artist?**

There are a lot of people in the world that are not martial artists and some of them even know it. If you just punch and kick well, you are not a martial artist. This Lesson does not answer the question it poses, but rather asks you to think of an answer. How soon does this transformation from *everyday Joe*, to Martial Artist, take place? And how long after you have quit practicing can you still call yourself a martial artist?

**Technique**

**ANALYZE YOUR ACTIONS** - Shining a spotlight on your thoughts and behaviors encourages change. You'll notice areas which need improvement, and you will reinforce positive thoughts and tendencies. It also helps you to become a master over your actions rather than prisoner of your reactions.

**MODULE ONE - LESSON ELEVEN****Mastering Your Internal Environment**

Our internal environment is made up of thoughts, vibration and consciousness. It is the lens through which we view the world. Our internal environment ultimately determines the degree of happiness that we experience over our lifetime.

**Technique**

**CONTROLLING YOUR INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT** - Rather than blaming outside forces for your moods and behaviors, you can gain control over your internal environment by gaining control of the breath. We have all heard that taking several deep breathes when angry helps calm you down. This suggestion seems so simple that we dismiss it in search of more advanced techniques, but in fact the breath and the mind are inseparable. The condition of one directly reflects the condition of the other.

**MODULE ONE - LESSON TWELVE****Meditation**

Meditation is the foundation of all true martial arts; but meditation is such a catch-all term that people use it when referring to any internal work. Visualizations, affirmations, hypnosis, channeling, even journaling has been categorized as meditation. Anything metaphysical is included in the definition. *Meditation is specifically the practice of stilling and disciplining the mind, learning to unplug the senses, clearing the mind of all thought.*

**Technique**

**MEDITATION** is not just a breathing exercise. The goal in meditation is to detach from the senses and clear the mind of all thought. Meditation helps you to connect with what is real in that moment. This may appear to be inactivity, but in truth it is the highest and most powerful form of activity that man can be engaged in.

**MODULE TWO - LESSON ONE****Style vs. Style**

For martial artists and non-martial artists it is popular to imagine competitions pitting one style against another, but martial arts has existed for thousands of years. If there was truly one style that was superior, the rest would have fallen away. In truth it is impossible to measure one style against another. At best you can measure one man against another, and every art has its legends and masters. If the true intent of martial arts is the destruction of the ego and the realization of Oneness, then competition can only exist between fighters, not between martial artists.

**MODULE TWO - LESSON TWO****Peaks, Valleys and Plateaus**

Throughout your practice you will have peaks. These are seemingly high points when you feel good about yourself and your progress. After a test, demonstration or exhibition or maybe just a particularly hard class that you did well in. You will also have valleys. These are periods of time when your internal dialogue starts to get you. You feel like you are not getting it. You ask yourself, “What is the use?” Maybe you start skipping classes and are feeling bored. These peaks and valleys are a natural part of practice. The key is to understand that neither state will last long. Then there are plateaus — much longer periods of time when no specific progress is made, but you really don’t feel too bad about practice either. It is this drawn-out period of indifference that you should beware of. What is dangerous to our practice is not the plateau itself, but rather the perception that we should *a/ways* be making progress.

**MODULE TWO - LESSON THREE****Conscious Relaxation**

Most people do not know what it is to truly relax. Their bodies are filled with tension and their minds are filled with stress. One of the most important things that we can do for ourselves is to take time each day and consciously relax.

**MODULE TWO - LESSON FOUR****Mushin**

Mushin is a very advanced concept but it is talked about so openly and freely that many people feel that they have mastered the state before they even really understand the term. The direct translation of the Japanese *mushin* is *no-mind*, and it is one of the highest states of consciousness that the martial artist can achieve. It refers to moving spontaneously and creatively without thought. Bruce Lee called this state, "...when *it* happens." Usheiba Sensei said, "It is when spirit flows through you." As martial artists, our job is to first be the greatest technicians that we can possibly be, and *then* learn to get out of the way.

**MODULE TWO - LESSON FIVE****Deeper Purpose of Sparring**

Sparring gives us the opportunity to be in the moment. The mind cannot drift to the past or wander to the future when someone is trying to punch and kick you. It must remain in the now. In sparring you get a glimpse of your ego and how it responds when pushed. How you feel when you win and how you feel when you lose are very important parts of practice. Michael Jordan does not love basketball, Baryshnikov does not love ballet, and Muhammad Ali did not love boxing. They all loved the *state of consciousness* that they are able to achieve during these activities. When sparring, make sure that it is the state of consciousness that you are enjoying and not just the ego gratification that comes from winning.

**MODULE TWO - LESSON SIX****Tuning in Your Intuition**

Your *Consciousness T.V.* has three channels. **The Sensory Channel** consists of happy, sad, good, and bad; and it is broadcasting *all of the time*. Anything experienced through the five senses is broadcast over the Sensory Channel. The average person tunes into this channel 16 plus hours a day. **The Subconscious Channel** consists of dreams that most of us flip to for six to eight hours a night, just so that we can be well rested for tomorrow's sensory channel experiences. We have a third channel available to us, and it is **The Intuition Channel**. The more that you tune into this channel the clearer the reception becomes.

**MODULE TWO - LESSON SEVEN****Understanding the Force Within**

Vital Life Force Energy in China is known as *chi*, in Japan as *ki*, and in India it is called *prana*. Vital Life Force Energy is the basis of Asian philosophy and medicine. It takes three ingredients to manipulate vital life force energy; deep concentration, almost super human will and the complete mastery of the breath. Why would anyone want to manipulate energy? One reason would be for martial application, to punch and kick harder, or to be able to withstand powerful blows without being affected. This is an immature and ego-driven reason. A second reason someone would manipulate vital life force energy is for health. This is a much more noble reason. However, if you begin announcing to everyone that you are a healer that can manipulate chi, you still are likely to fall into the trap of ego gratification. Finally there is the desire to use the energy as a *chi gong* or *pranayama* technique to deepen your meditation. This is the ultimate reason one should learn to manipulate vital life force energy.

**MODULE TWO - LESSON EIGHT****Responding to Attacks**

When energy comes in there are only four ways to respond.

1. You can get hit. Translation; become hurt, defensive, or scared.
2. You can block the energy with power against power.  
Translation; "Oh yeah, take this." Or "What about that?" or maybe, "You do it too!"
3. Best block, don't be there! Translation; avoid the conversation; keep changing the topic .
4. Merge, harmonize or blend. This would mean seeing the attacker as a partner. Thus, you attempt to minimize the pain to all.

**MODULE TWO - LESSON NINE****The Never-Ending Path of Martial Arts**

Martial arts are not simply an activity, game or sport. Throughout history it has been referred to as a path, and although this analogy is very accurate, most Westerners want to know what is at the end of this path? Specifically, where is it going? How long will it take? How will I know when I get there? But martial arts is a path without an end. If you find this frustrating, then you do not yet understand the practice. It is not about belts, titles and trophies, but something much more important than these things. This path is about you.

**MODULE TWO - LESSON TEN****What Can Injuries Teach Us?**

Injuries are a crucial part of practice. While usually viewed as a negative, they can help us understand the effectiveness and power of our techniques. They teach us patience and give us the opportunity to work on different areas of our art. Sometimes they are severe enough that they allow us to see what we can learn from the edge of the mat.

**MODULE TWO - LESSON ELEVEN****Why Practice Must Intensify With Time**

An advanced student should not only know more techniques than a beginner, but should throw the basic techniques better, faster and with more power. Early in your practice the techniques may be performed slowly with little resistance. As you progress, your practice must take on a more intense flavor that simulates a real life attack and defense. This falls under the category of *practice what you want to perform*. You must practice with the same intensity that you would use if you were being attacked.

**MODULE TWO - LESSON TWELVE****Past, Present and Future of Martial Arts**

The only way to ensure that this ancient discipline of mind, body and spirit called martial arts continues is for *you* to practice hard and to continue to help spread the philosophy to as many people as possible. *You* are the future; it is in your passion, effort, and example that these teachings will continue.

## Recommended Reading

**Aikido and the Dynamic Sphere**

A. Westbrook and O. Ratti

**Spiritual Diary**

Paramahansa Yogananda