



#1

Martial Arts Is Life



Let your hands
give wings to your mind,
that you may find
an ever-greater Power of Life,
a Power preserving the
sanctity of your soul
and illuminating the radiance
of your Perfection.

If you believe that martial arts training is designed to enable you to beat up on others, I would suggest you look within yourself to assess why you feel a need to impose yourself on others. I would then suggest you look more deeply within yourself to determine the true meaning of martial arts training, that training that guides you upward to the higher ideals of nobility and self-mastery, for in the end the true test of our skill and achievement lies not in our mastery of others, but in mastery of ourselves. As the famed Pythagoras so eloquently stated, *No man is free who cannot control himself*, and most certainly, martial arts training teaches us to control ourselves before anything else.

Martial Arts is Life. Everything we do when we train has some correlation to life outside the milieu of our training ground - be that ground the floor of a dojo, studio, gym, backyard, living room, meadow, forest, or mountain top. It doesn't matter where we study. The thing of importance is

that we do study, that we engage ourselves in the process of learning and developing our character, courage, strength, will, devotion, discipline, dedication, concentration, commitment, consistency, focus, flexibility, respect for ourselves and others; patience, tolerance, tenderness, kindness, poise, calm, centeredness, self-control and the integration of our body, mind and spirit. The list of attributes is endless, but everything mentioned above is a life principle and they are all an integral part of martial arts training and education.

Martial arts is an internal path, not an external path, although ostensibly it appears to be external. Often in our training we are pitted against an opponent to hone and test our skills, but in reality our real opponent is life, and he is a very worthy adversary. When he attacks us, as he does often with great tenacity, we need skills to defeat him and advance ourselves onward and upward. Yet, his purpose is not to destroy but sculpt, to strengthen and make us worthy of greater achievements.

Therefore, to get the most from our martial arts training, my suggestion is that every time we train we see such training as life training, not simply martial arts training, because in the final analysis martial arts is not just an extracurricular activity. Martial Arts is Life.



#2



Your Life, Your Responsibility

In your life journey from breath to death,
replete with all its possibility,
never forget . . .this is *Your Life*,
and it most surely is *Your Responsibility*.

Work out your own salvation.

Do not depend on others.

Buddha

[400 BCE]

I blame no one.

I blame my own karmas.

Guru Nanak

[15th/16th Century]

You are responsible for yourself.

You are not responsible for the world.

Saint Charan Singh

[20th Century]

Our world is quickly being transformed from one of independence to dependence. Everywhere we look someone is making or attempting to make someone else responsible for them and their lives. These souls have lost sight of their dignity and self-respect, choosing rather to rely on someone else to take care of them rather than they taking care of their own selves, their own lives.

This condition of looking to others for one's well-being is not the way of the natural world. It is the way of the unnatural world, and through the unnatural order of things a person loses the great gift of learning to stand on his own two feet and be counted as one who, in the end, although perhaps bloodied, crippled, worn, torn, abused and bruised, challenged life himself and ultimately emerged victorious. In the private battle of life there is dignity. In the private battle of life there is great nobility. In the private battle of life there is courage, and definitely emerging from the private battle of life is the tranquility of an undaunted and indomitable spirit.

From moment one in martial arts training the focus is on personal growth through one's individual efforts. The warrior journey is not one of looking to others for one's success. It is a solo journey of looking to, and relying upon, the self. It is a path forcing the soul to stand on its own two feet and be accountable for its life in all aspects. For the warrior, the path is not about holding hands. It is about holding and manifesting a vision of self-doing, self-worth and personal dignity.

Take kumite for example. Kumite is sparring, i.e., controlled combat. It is the pitting of ourselves against another, and it is done *alone*. It is not done while holding hands with another or looking to another to protect us from our opponent. When learning to fight in such a controlled way, we learn step by step to solve our own problems, to take blows, to give them,

to face and overcome our fears, to do for ourselves while disallowing others to do for us. By learning to stand up and fight our own fights, we become skilled, strong, courageous, confident, self-reliant, composed, whole. We learn that the outcome of the fight rests solely within us and everything we bring to the challenge. We learn that the outcome of the struggle is our responsibility, not someone else's. We learn, ultimately, that through this process of combat our life is, indeed, our life, and it is most assuredly, our responsibility.

This principle of self-responsibility is not only life-enriching, it is life-preserving and never more clear than in the case of a beautiful young martial arts student about five feet tall and maybe ninety-five pounds dripping wet. Before going off to college she reached the rank of brown belt, a noteworthy accomplishment.

After arriving at college, this vibrant young woman was walking down one of the main roadways in the city. Without warning, a car pulled up beside her, stopped, and out jumped several guys who attacked her and tried to pull her into the car. With an understanding that her life was her responsibility, she went into aggressive self-defense mode. She fought back - one young, tiny college coed against male assailants all intent on rape or worse. She kicked, she scratched, she punched, she blocked, she refused to be taken and transported against her will. Eventually, the bad guys decided she was too much trouble and not worth their nefarious efforts. They got back into their vehicle and fled the scene. She survived. Hurrah for her! How did she survive? She survived because she knew the fundamental principle of life is that *It's Your Life; It's Your Responsibility*.