

Concentration and the Martial Artist

by A. J. Perry

Concentration by itself seems like a very simple word: "Concentration-a means by which humans process voluntary and involuntary thought in order to focus on a particular task." This process happens so quickly that many people take this skill for granted. Concentration is the skill of focusing your attention. This skill should be developed not only for your martial arts training, but for everyday life. Throughout our day we are bombarded with all types of external stimuli in everything we do. For example: a young man in college is studying for an exam outside a campus while sitting at the base of a tree. Suddenly, a pretty girl walks by and he looks up attentively. At the same time, his girlfriend, who is sitting next to him, elbows him in the ribs. If this young man kept his focus on studying for his exam he would not have sore ribs.

It is absolutely amazing how the human brain can process so much information in a split second. Because the brain has the ability to process large amounts of information, we humans sometimes forget to focus on the tasks at hand. We want to do math in English class!

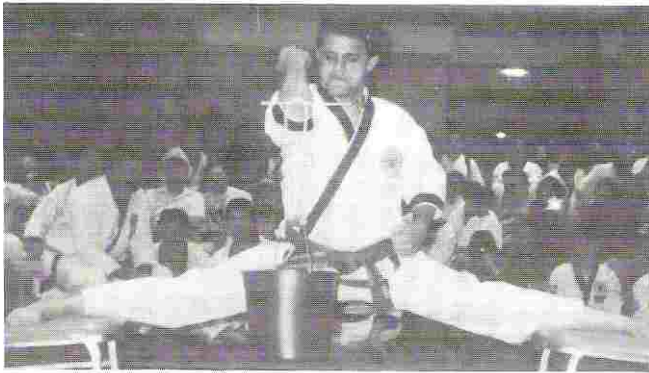
Developing the skills of concentration takes time, patience and practice; just like our martial arts skills. But just as a student makes a choice to practice the art of Tang Soo Do (karate), they must also make a choice when it comes to focus.

Beginner students in martial arts sometimes become overwhelmed because everything in this experience is new and there is so much to learn. A good instructor will point out early to beginner students to eat one bite at a time and chew it well.

How can students start to develop their concentration in their Martial Arts training?

FIRST: Preparation

Think to yourself how many times have you rushed out the door at home to get to class to make it there just as



Master A.J. Perry demonstrates concentration as he does a straddle split and lifts a bucket of water which is attached to a large needle which has been placed through his arm.

soon as class is lining up to begin. You started class already with the wrong mind set.

Give yourself at least an extra 20 minutes before class to prepare. Don't sit around the do jang (studio) talking during this time, but stretch out and try to relax with a few breathing exercises. Prepare your mind and body to learn. Forget about all the things that have been bombarding you during the course of the day - Suzie Q next door, your car or mortgage payment - just prepare for class quietly - empty your mind.

SECOND: Focus on the task at hand

When class starts, don't let your mind drift from your training by seeing if you can pop that side kick out a little higher than the person across or next to you. Compete with yourself. For example: if you took the time to notice you weren't kicking as high as a certain person in the class, then you must not be 100% focused on what you were doing. Don't worry or take notice of such trivial things. This is nothing but ego, not a positive move. If you don't understand the task at hand or technique, then ask questions. That is why you are there as a student; because you are learning. . . so ask questions! If a student doesn't ask questions or cannot take constructive help or criticism, then their pride is in the way of their focus.

Almost everyone has looked through a pair of binoculars at one time or another. In order to see the object we are searching for, we have to look down a narrow field of vision and slowly dial the focusing bridge until we can see clearly. Martial arts training is the same. Sometimes students struggle, but with persistence, time, patience and practice, things come into focus.

After class is over, practice extra on particular areas you are having trouble with.

THIRD: Keep a positive attitude - you can do it!

Everyone has probably heard "Success breeds success" used loosely from time to time. It is very true! If parents let their children run around with other children with poor attitudes, then eventually their children will come home with that same poor attitude, guaranteed.

Adults need to remember that if we socialize with others with poor or negative attitudes, then it will also rub off on us. If one desires to do well at martial arts, then they must maintain a clean, positive lifestyle. Stay away from alcohol, drugs or things which will hinder your true focus. Try to be around people that will encourage you in your life and build you up, not tear you down.

Students on the road in their martial arts career, have the same goal - to do well. They should help and encourage each other down that road.

Advanced students in the martial arts have an obligation to the lower ranking students to concentrate and focus on keeping a beginner's mind focused. When I refer to advanced students, I am referring to Black Belts and Masters. Occasionally upon attending a tournament, I see some Black Belts or Masters strutting around like roosters in a barn yard, all fighting for supremacy. This is nothing but ego and it hurts martial arts.

Masters and Black Belts should remember that the students are watching you and they don't miss a beat. Instructors should be a prime example to the lower ranking students, whether the students are his or not. If the Black Belts don't train hard and stay focused, then it will bleed down to the lower ranks eventually.

FOUR: Consistency

In order to do well in martial arts or anything that matters, one must practice consistently. On the days you pick to train, don't let anything get in the way of these sessions. In order to improve upon your concentration and focus in your training and life, you must practice regularly. We live in a fast food and instant type of society. People aren't happy unless we have a hamburger in 30 seconds. And if we don't get it in 30 seconds but 31, we'll go to the hamburger joint down the street. If you want to do well in martial arts and improve upon your focus, don't be so worried about when you are going to improve - just practice and everything else will happen naturally. There is no magic potion or elixir to drink - just practice consistently and earnestly.



Concentration is also needed to perform high kicks.

About the Author: Master Perry is a 5th Dan teaching at A. J. Perry Martial Arts Dojang in Vermilion, OH.

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Spring Tournaments

1995 Spring tournament season got off to a great start with the 1995 All Martial Arts Championship. This was the 22nd anniversary tournament held in Malden, MA on Saturday, April 8th. Students from Louisiana, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Ohio added to the competitive air as over 375 competed for trophies in Forms, Sparring and Board Breaking. The tournament was also attended by other martial arts such as Tae Kwon Do and Shotokan. This made for a great day of shared brotherhood in the martial arts.



Dignitaries and other Black Belts with Form Grand Champion Hoang Kroeger and Sparring Grand Champion Dan Cunningham.



David Bell places 1st in Black Belt Men's Breaking with a double jump front kick through 4 boards!

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