

HOW MARTIAL ARTS CAN POSITIVELY CHANGE LIVES

THE FIRST STEP ON A JOURNEY INTO MARTIAL ARTS STARTS TODAY



BY TRACY LEE THOMAS

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Introduction:

This book discusses the many ways in which training in the martial arts positively changes lives and makes people stronger, better and happier. I dedicate it to you, the strong, the beautiful, the capable and the wonderful you who battles life's challenges with strength and strives each day to be better than you were yesterday.

You are a real-life hero and all successes of the world belong to you. Martial arts is your way to lead a clean, harmonious, balanced, courageous and happy life. ***How Martial Arts Can Positively Change Lives*** is designed to be a quick read about the same. It lists 11 of the several ways in which martial arts training changes lives positively.

I can say so because I have walked the path as a student, instructor and master in the art

A trainee of the martial arts since a very young age (am I thankful for that!), I consider myself a life-long student of this wonderful discipline. My association with martial arts began in 1980. While my folks knew martial arts training would keep their restless son busy with productive activity, little had they speculated of the extent to which the training would have influenced me. It completely transformed my life!

As for me, what started as a mere co-curricular activity and self-defense class, developed into a strong passion in a matter of months. Training in the martial arts taught me the respect, self-discipline, self-confidence and the self-esteem I needed in an ever-changing world. Martial Arts made me everything I am today, which is why martial arts will remain for me, a life-long affair.

Today I am an author, a successful entrepreneur, a martial-arts school owner and a Master Instructor of the martial arts myself. I owe the success directly to the values instilled in me through martial arts training. Today I am an optimistic individual, a husband, a father, a passionate human being and a content soul. I owe the success to the character building and personal development initiated in me through martial arts training.

“But how can training in the martial arts make you successful, optimistic, respectful, patient, passionate or content?” If you are wondering the same, read on – ***How Martial Arts Can Positively Change Lives*** has been written to answer that very question. And many more!

Come join me on the path to leading a happy, successful and content life with martial arts

Today, as a martial-arts school owner, I join my fellow martial artists in the expedition to enhance the life skills of our fellow Americans and to add value to our community in the process. As a master instructor, my goal with this book is to extend my knowledge to you on the features and benefits of receiving training in any of the several forms of the martial arts, at a school near you.

By teaching children of all ages (yes! that includes you who are a child at heart and an adult in other respects) the necessary awareness skills and self-defense concepts, we're doing our part in making America safe and confident. The fact that you have this book with you right now – whether you came across it at a bookstore, or online, or on a martial arts website – is proof that the universe wants you to be happy!

I sincerely hope you take the first step on this beautiful journey to a stronger, better and happier living through martial arts.

An article published in the May 1985 edition of *Psychology Today*, identified three key differences between long-time practitioners of martial arts and the control group (that is, people who do not practice martial arts).

- Higher self-esteem
- Lower subversiveness
- Lower anxiety
- Higher social intelligence
- Increased sense of responsibility

The first group (martial artists) were found to experience a higher increase in self-esteem than the second group (non-martial artists). They were found more likely to take responsibilities on their shoulders and less likely to be radical. They were found to be more socially intelligent than their peers and reported lower levels of stress and anxiety.

Five key differences and none talk about violence. Fancy that!

It may surprise you. But that's the truth: there is much, much more to martial arts than the physical movements and violence commonly projected in works of fiction. A better, more realistic way to define martial arts would be to call it the path between self-perfection and self-protection. Together, the two help transform one's life into a lighter, brighter and happier celebration.

Here's how:

Martial arts training will produce affective, behavioral and cognitive benefits in practitioners, which have been backed by several researchers. These include J.R. Fuller (*Martial arts and psychological health., 1988*), who found martial arts improves self-esteem and Duthie (*Selected personality traits of martial artists as measured by the adjective checklist, 1978*), who found it improves the feeling of self-reliance or autonomy.

Similarly, M.E. Trulson (*Martial arts training: a novel 'cure' for juvenile delinquency*) plus C.L. Richman and H. Rehberg (*The development of self-esteem through martial arts*) found in two separate studies in 1986, that martial arts training produced a more positive reaction to physical stimulus in practitioners.

X.S. Cai (*Physical exercise and mental health: a content integrated approach in coping with college students' anxiety and depression.*, 2000) associated martial arts with reduced depression and anxiety, while B. Konzak and F. Boudreau (*Martial arts training and mental health: An exercise in self-help*, 1984) associated it with higher emotional stability, increased assertiveness and positive behavioral changes.

These studies are only a tiny fraction of the vast array of medical and scientific studies positively linking martial arts with several concepts of happier, high-quality living. So, what does martial arts mean to you? Do you think of it as a combat technique? Do you consider it to be a series of violent kicks and punches? Do you consider it to be a fun workout? Do you see it as a means to create a positive lifestyle?

Reviewing the literature on martial arts benefits for holistic development, you'll realize it is the single most comprehensive way of leading a good, healthy, happy and safe life!

Martial arts: Different meanings for different people

And if you don't want to review literature, but still want to know what martial arts exactly is, or how it can change your life completely, here are nine quotes from martial artists you may have heard of before. These quotes can be found online or in movies that tell you what martial arts reality is to them, as a martial artist. I have chosen names of people you may recognize via known quotes by famous martial artists that may only be known by the martial arts community.

1. **As goal setting**— For *Chuck Norris*, I think setting a goal, getting a visual image of what it is you want. You've got to see what it is you want to achieve before you can pursue it.

2. **A story-teller** – For *Jet Li*, martial arts can be used to tell different stories, and not just the ones associated with combat and violence. He lists the popular 2000 wuxia film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* as an example, saying director Ang Lee used martial arts in the film to talk about love.
3. **An inner pursuit** – For *Brandon Lee*, martial arts is much more than a physical discipline. It is an introspection and a search for something inside a practitioner.
4. **An expression** – For *Donnie Yen*, martial arts is a method of expression. One, which arises from a martial artist's inner self and reaches their hands and legs.
5. **An exercise in character development** – For Bruce Lee, to know oneself is to study oneself in action with another person.
6. **A way to find self-love** – For *Tony Jaa*, martial arts is the path to attaining self-love, which is the primary reason why he practices martial arts. Jaa has in fact said he does not practice the form to win over other people, but only to win over his own heart.
7. **A calming tactic** – For *Steven Seagal*, who calls himself a lifelong learner of martial arts, the training helps him maintain calmness and composure even when faced with danger or adversity.
8. **A form of meditation** – For *Joe Rogan*, martial arts is meditation in motion. He reasons this out by explaining how a martial artist can think of nothing else but the task at hand, when sparring or using drilling techniques in different martial arts.
9. **A fun workout** – For *Milla Jovovich*, martial arts is an interesting way to exercise. She prefers performing the martial arts over going to the gym, because for her, time passes faster in the former.

She also considers martial arts as the solution to all the weight and body image-related controversies surrounding women. One of her most famous quotes is where she advises all girls and women to do martial arts, saying “everything will be okay” once they make martial arts a habit. She lists happiness and a toned-up body as two advantages.

As you can see there are many reasons people train in martial arts. Read on to find more impressive things about martial arts and the several reasons why you, your family and friends should begin training.

Chapter 2: A Boost in Self-Confidence that Lasts a Lifetime

“Believe in yourself.” “Be confident!” These are easily, two of the most frequently handed out pieces of advice ever. Not without good reason. Self-confidence is without doubt, the first requisite to accomplishing anything great. Self-confidence is the first requisite to accomplishing anything worthwhile. It is what makes things happen.

And what's especially noteworthy about self-confidence is the positive effect it has at a more holistic level. Your mood, your personal relationships, your social circles, academic and co-curricular achievements, career are all affected by how confident you are in yourself. And the affect is so strong that whether you think you can, or you think you can't, you prove yourself right. Martial Arts training overcomes the negative thinking and obstacles that give the mind set of “I can't”. Both children and adults see an immediate change in their mindset while taking martial arts.

This is because self-confidence gives you an edge over others in school, college, work, relationships and life in general. When you believe you can, you actually *can*. The lack of self-confidence on the other hand, brings you down in all aspects of life. When you believe you can't, you unfortunately really *can't*.

The relationship between self-confidence and happiness

Sure self-confidence is the first requirement of any great achievement. But, more than that, it is the road to definite happiness. The more confident you are about yourself as a child or adult, the more optimistic you feel about your prospects. The more positive your outlook each day and the happier you feel about life equates to longevity.

Wait – have you seen *any* happy-go-lucky person who lack confidence in themselves? No right? Further, self-confidence safeguards you from the clutches of upsetting emotions, including jealousy, self-doubt, disappointment (at criticisms or rejection), insecurity and depression. You are so assured of yourself that nothing can bring your inner feel-good feeling down!

The bad news is, self-confidence is not something you're born with. It is something you need to develop. The good news is, there are easy ways to do so. Martial Arts is one of the top methods in order to achieve personal goals with self-confidence. The earlier one starts, the more positive impact will be seen. Teachers, parents, family, friends and communities themselves see the positive aspects martial arts training for children in school, socially, at home and life in general.

Keep calm and be confident in yourself with martial arts training

Self-confidence is a derivative of your self-worth. That is, your self-confidence increases (or decreases) based on how high (or low) you assert your own worth. Now self-worth is very closely related to your self-esteem, which in turn, is a function of the difference between your self-image and ideal self.

That is, the difference between how you think you are, and how you wish you were. The smaller the difference, the more confident you are. Martial arts helps you bridge that gap between self-image and ideal self, improving your self-confidence. With martial arts training you will:

1. **Feel naturally confident** – You will feel in control of situations and suffer from less anxiety, panic attacks, guilt and feeling of inadequacy.
2. **Unlock your full potential** – You will find the power to explore new opportunities, take-up responsibilities, make commitments, take calculated risks and get more out of everything you encounter in school, at work, home, socially and on a day to day basis.
3. **Be calm and enjoy solitude** – You will be less affected by criticisms and negative emotions of others because you are assured in your own worth. You will also be able to unlock the power of solitude that people with low self-confidence simply cannot. They break down when left without company for some time. Not you.
4. **Feel worthy and be loved** – Regardless of your financial or social status, you will feel worthy because of the confidence that comes from within. The feeling will reflect in your personality and draw all the right people to you. After all, only when you believe yourself to be worthy of

love, will others believe so too!

Martial arts vs traditional confidence-building exercises

Compared to other exercises for building self-confidence, which are more focused on changing perceptions about yourself and others, martial arts focuses on getting you close to the ideal self, through rigorous mind, body and soul workouts that improve your performance in all walks of life.

Martial arts has proven to be stronger, faster and better than traditional exercises in boosting the confidence of individuals. Several researchers have found and published, the positive correlation between martial arts training and higher self-confidence. These include the studies by Duthie, R.B., Hope, L. and Barker, D.G (1978), Konzak and Bourdeau (1984) and Spear (1989).

Furthermore, Spear found that martial arts training lead military trainees to cultivate higher self-confidence and better group morale, than resistance training, fitness training, obstacle course training and other training routines.

Chapter 3: Increased Self-Esteem

Negative self-esteem is hands down, the most unhealthy and unsafe mindset a person can live with. It leaves no facet of life untouched. From inter-personal or social relationships and employment, to physical and mental health – poor self-esteem causes frustration, fear and subsequent failure. In fact, there would be no exaggeration at all, in calling poor self-esteem a heinous destroyer. It ruins potential and takes lives down a wrong path.

High and positive self-esteem on the other hand, is the key to having a successful career and leading a more fulfilling life. Psychologists consider it to be the *number one tool* that facilitates individuals in achieving personal plus professional goals.

Are you 100 percent happy with your self-image?

Walk over to your mirror and stand tall in front of it. Back straight, body erect and eyes on person that stares back at you from inside the mirror. What do you see? And more importantly, are you happy with what you see? Do you accept the person totally, with all the strengths and the flaws and without any shame or regret? Do you believe the person to be worthy of admiration? These are truly valuable questions to ask yourself or your children.

Having complaints about some aspects of your body or being is normal, and in fact, healthy. It is what keeps you growing as a person and improving. However, deep-rooted unhappiness and insecurities about the person you see in the mirror is a sign of poor self-image or low self-esteem.

Find affirmation for the person in the mirror with martial arts

Contrary to what popular media will have you believe, martial arts is *not* just about kicking, punching and combating with others. Masters of Martial Arts will tell you the truth – martial arts is all about building a better mind, a more positive psyche and about learning the different ways of peaceful conflict management, including the ones you have with yourself. It levels the head and the heart and makes you more accepting of yourself as well as others. The equilibrium in life for me was and still is

martial arts.

With martial arts training you can learn to:

- **Be yourself** – You'll “unlearn” your need for approval and learn how to be at peace with your individuality, so that you can follow your own views and values peacefully.
- **Be more accepting of yourself and others** – High self-esteem allows you to be more forgiving and less critical of your (and others') mistakes. You no longer feel the need to be perfect. You no longer feel the need to know everything.
- **Accept disagreements without worrying** – Conflicting opinions of others will no longer bother you or bring you down thereby learning to put down the defensive wall you may have created over time.
- **Increase personal sense of commitment** – That new project you've been asked to handle at work will no longer make you anxious or give you sleepless nights. That new relationship you've been fretting about, will feel easier. High self-esteem increases your sense of self-worth and gives you the courage to commit to personal and professional goals.
- **Increase personal rate of success** – Yes, you read that right. Success in achieving *any* personal goal you've set for yourself. This is because high self-esteem creates optimism (half your battle is won right there!), reduces pressure and makes you more resilient. You're not afraid to try, fail and tray again. You're not afraid to meet new challenges or navigate new territory. You're in fact, ready for everything that comes your way!

Here's some empirical evidence

There have been several studies linking martial arts training to improved self-esteem. A 1990 study on a particular martial arts (*Effect of Participation in Taekwondo on College Women's Self Concept*) found that students who finished one semester of martial arts training showed higher self esteem – more self-control and less feelings of vulnerability, than students without martial arts training. Similarly, in 1979 Madeline found that martial arts training helped troubled adolescents increase self-esteem better than traditional behavioral treatments.

Chapter 4: Martial Arts Fosters Self-Discipline

Danger comes in several forms, and worst of all, it lurks around in every corner. Only sometimes, does it take the form of an armed stranger. More commonly, you can find it disguised as pervasive temptations or the ubiquitous peer pressure. One puff of smoke, one shot of tequila, one dose of the popular drug other kids on the block are doing or one evening of drunk driving – danger is *every* wrong decision or choice that has the potential to change life forever in a split second, if not threaten it altogether. So many parents, so many adults have told the story of how one second of their life, they made a dangerous choice and their life was negatively changed forever.

So how do you deal with this danger? *By making the right decisions, yes.* What do you teach the younger ones about such dangers? *You teach them the importance of making the right decision.* Okay fair enough. But how do you ensure loved ones stray clear of danger, even when you're not around?

In today's ever changing world and age, the temptation to make all the wrong decisions can be particularly strong, especially for our youth. The allure of the “forbidden” is strong as it is. Add to it the fact that technology gives most children the assurance of not getting “caught”, and you have all the reasons why mastering self-restraint is an absolute *must!* Children, youth and adults who lack self-restraint make poor choices. And such choices destroy their life!

I have in fact seen how families across the world decay because of poor choices made by a family member. The stress, the accelerated aging process, and dividing relationships have torn families apart. As a master in martial arts, I can assure you that you (and the children) will be able to rise above the temptation of making wrong decisions with ease and effectiveness. Martial arts will enhance your level of happiness as well as longevity in life by making you adept in valuable life skills.

Self-discipline is the *one* ring to rule them all!

Yes, that's right. It is the key to exercising will power, fighting the allure of instant gratification and staying committed to goal-oriented behavior even in the face of strong temptations. Thus, in everyday situations, you need self-discipline for even simple things that impact your life in complex ways.

- Not eating that piece of cake
- Not skipping exercise
- Switching soda with lemon water
- Following daily hygiene regiments
- Driving safe
- Finishing that chapter you've been struggling with
- Finishing the work report
- Waking up on your own and get to school
- Going to work on time
- Controlling a temper

All of these require intense self-discipline.

Take a moment to think about something you've wanted to achieve for a long time now but haven't been successful so far. Thought? Okay. Next think about the factors that have prevented you from being successful so far. Done? Good. Now picture a new, totally disciplined you. Take the time to truly visualize yourself as you want to see yourself. The power of visualization is yours to control.

You, who has developed the power to stay goal-oriented even when said factors come into play. You, who is strong enough to delay the feeling of gratification for as long as it takes. You, who is determined to exercise correct judgment *no matter what!* Your goal doesn't feel that difficult now, does it? In fact, you can already picture yourself achieving it, finally. Congratulations!

What makes martial arts your best teacher of self-discipline

Discipline is deeply woven in the very fabric of martial arts. Independent of individual types, martial arts as a whole philosophizes discipline, perseverance, confidence and honor. No matter what style you choose to train in, you'll find the heavy presence of these values in your training. And this is precisely what makes martial arts, the best way of learning discipline.

You (and the children) are taught self-discipline skills to follow at home, work and school, not just in your martial arts class. Further, these skills include lessons on patience, courtesy, humility and honor, such as speaking properly to adults, using peaceful methods (and not karate moves-unless a last

resort) for conflict resolution, controlling impulse decision-making urges, being kind even in adverse situations and abiding by other healthy rules of living in today's world.

Within the martial arts spectrum, straying away from self-discipline results in the loss of earning a belt or other uniformed ranks, which further deepens learners' commitment to being disciplined through achievements. More martial artists therefore, are able to cultivate self-discipline as a way of life. So can you!

As a student of martial arts, I learned early in life that discipline is a composition of eight different elements, each element equally critical to the overall cultivation of self-discipline. Today, as a self-made man, I can vouch for each of the elements and their contribution to personal and professional success. But first, allow me to share what the martial arts have taught me about discipline.

Discipline is made up of 8 D's

I learned this over three decades ago, when my martial arts instructor, introduced us to the values of respect, discipline and honor through our very first martial arts lesson as children. Fast forward 35 years and now, as a master instructor myself, it gives me immense pleasure to share the same with you. I created the 8'D's of discipline as a guide for students many years ago. Your instructor will have added and valuable knowledge that will help you on the your martial arts journey.

The eight elements of all-round discipline I taught were:

1. Decision – To always make the right choice in all walks of life.
2. Dissolve – All negative thoughts that originate within and cripple self-confidence.
3. Defuse – Problematic solutions instead of aggravating them and offending people.
4. Discipline – To stay focused on the goals of life.
5. Determination – To overcome all obstructions and obstacles in life.
6. Dedication – Toward becoming a positive person.
7. Devote – Time towards personal development each day, such that mental, physical and spiritual balance is obtained.

8. Defeat – Is not an option in life and no one should choose defeat in any path of life.

Together, the 8 D's combine through martial arts training to create a strong sense of discipline and control in your life. One that, *(and this is my personal guarantee)* stays with you all your life and transcends into a way of living.

Through training in each of the 8 D's of discipline, martial arts taught me that:

- **Life is all about choices.**

Why the lesson should matter to you: Right choices are instrumental for personal safety and determine both, the length and the quality of life you and those around you lead. In younger children, making wrong choices is often a tactic to get along with other people or a sad result of peer pressure. Discipline gives them the inner strength to be true to their selves and take the right decisions.

- **Negativity weighs us down and should be avoided.**

Why the lesson should matter to you: Negativity breeds failure – as simple as that. Your negative thoughts diminish potential, make you feel bad about yourself and cause problems in relationships. They make to feel bad about yourself and lead to lower self-worth, poor self-acceptance, negative self-image and little or no self-love.

Positivity on the other hand, makes you feel worthy of love, admiration, respect and of receiving equal opportunities to flourish in life. In younger children, negativity sows the first seeds of lower self-respect. Positivity is important for them to feel loved, accepted and cared for.

- **It's better to defuse a situation than to be extra defensive and pick up a fight.**

Why the lesson should matter to you: You show inner strength and self-assurance by refusing to fight and choosing respectful dialogue for conflict resolution. Violence is often the preferred method of the mentally and spiritually insecure people. It is important for younger children to learn that defusing messy situations is *always* better than aggravating them.

- **Keeping the company of like-minded people is a great way to learn.**

Why the lesson should matter to you: Life's most precious lessons are learned outside of classrooms. Good company especially helps children learn right from the wrong. Bad company actively pushes them (often against their will and inner voice) towards wrong activities. Soon, the inner voice learns to keep quiet and children forget the difference between right and wrong altogether.

- **Determination is the foundation of overcoming every obstacle (big or small) in life.**

Why the lesson should matter to you: Skill and talent can take you only as far as your determination goes. Where would Cristiano Ronaldo or Lionel Messi be without their repeated drills and practice? Where would David Bowie or Jim Morrison be without the daily practice and the “same old” repetition of their acts? Where would the great winners of Mr. Olympia be without their strict diets and rigorous training?

They'd be somewhere we wouldn't know about. Determination turns something you “have to” do often, even every day, into something you really “want to” do day in and day out. It is a fundamental part of life and is the key to achieving any goal. Right from not breaking a diet, or not skipping gym to following goal-oriented actions every day – you need determination to be successful.

- **Influencing others with our own positive attitude and actions is part of our duty towards the society.**

Why the lesson should matter to you: You haven't filled your life's purpose until you've given someone something they cannot repay you for. What better thing to give than guidance to live life more positively and productively? This value has personally motivated me to open a small group of martial arts school and help thousands of people learn self-acceptance, love, discipline, respect and honor so that they grow up into strong adults with a warm and passionate soul.

- **Balance equals longevity in life.**

Why the lesson should matter to you: To be happy, you need to be spirituality healthy, just as much as you need physical or mental health.

- **Perseverance is the key to defeating defeat.**

Why the lesson should matter to you: Because success doesn't demand talent. It demands determination, discipline and persistence. Remove any from the equation and you are bound to run into defeat.

Why I bill martial arts as hands down, the *best* way of learning discipline

You can learn about discipline from self-help books. You can learn about discipline from the people around you. You can even learn about discipline from the so-called “experts” on the Internet. But nothing, and I repeat *nothing* comes even remotely close to learning it through martial arts training.

This is because with martial arts, you – 1) Receive dedicated training in *each* of the eight constituents of discipline, and 2) Learn by practicing and by living.

The skills of proper decision making, effective dissolution of negative thoughts, focused perseverance and of timely defusing potentially harmful situations are taught through different stance of the martial arts. You (and the kids) learn how to build and exercise long-term focus, dedication, determination and devotion. You (and the kids) learn how omit the word “defeat” from your personal vocabularies

and be all-round winners, through the different teachings of the martial arts.

But that's not even the best part. The best part is that you learn these things not just by practicing them inside the dojo, (called by a variety of names based on the style) but also by practicing them outside and by living your personal, social and professional life. The lessons thus quickly become your personal motto and a way of life.

Physical fitness is perhaps, the most noticeable way in which martial arts positively changes lives. This is because martial arts- demands the active movement of different parts of the body. Both gross and fine motor skills are being fine-tuned. You are constantly kicking, punching, pushing, jumping, shifting, flexing, rolling and diving, working different parts of the body including arms, head, feet, hands, knees, legs and elbows to name a few.

As a result, within a few of weeks, you begin noticing some *very visible* benefits of martial arts to your body, including:

- Reduction in weight
- Improved Balance
- Loss of body fat in all the right places
- Reduction of stubborn cellulite
- Stronger bones and firmer muscles
- Improved posture
- Glowing skin and toned body
- Fine tuned gross and fine motor skills
- Mental awareness
- Enhanced memory

And a magnificent reflection in the mirror that you just can't take your eyes off! Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? And these, mind you, are only the instantly visible benefits. Martial arts is also the route to enjoying a wide array of deep-seated benefits, that you'll discover slowly along the way.

Presenting the *TOP* physical-health benefits of martial arts

1. Be healthier
2. Sleep better
3. Live longer

4. ADD/ADHD management
5. Achieve target weight (and keep it there!)
6. Manage blood pressure
7. Build balance and flexibility
8. Reduce risk of injury while doing other physical activities, including the risks of falls in seniors.
9. Reduce risk of Type 2 diabetes, breast cancer and colon cancer
- 10.Reduce chances of developing depression
- 11.Boost heart health and stay clear of heart diseases, including hypertension and stroke
- 12.Boost bone strength and stay clear of Osteoporosis at older age
- 13.Boost immunity
- 14.Help the children reduce risk of, or manage, obesity, asthma and early onset of diabetes
- 15.Increase anaerobic power (the power output of your body for high-intensity short-term physical activity)
- 16.Build endurance and improve stamina

Now these, as you'll recall are only *a few* of the several physical fitness-related benefits. What's wonderful is that each of these benefits positively impacts your life in several ways. Take the body fat and weight related benefits for instance. With martial arts, you can say goodbye to flabby body and

hello to ripped muscles (and if you practice hard, washboard abs as well!). With that, you look good, go out more, get around better and most important of all, feel better yourself. Now isn't that just priceless?

Why martial arts trumps other forms of exercise

For the simple reason that familiarity breeds inefficiency! Routine exercises allow the intelligent human body to develop a pattern to decrease energy expenditure during physical activity. Your body adjusts burning fewer calories each time you repeat your 30 minutes on the treadmill, or other daily exercise. Martial Arts is not the typical boring or repetitive workout.

Since martial arts includes a variety of complex movements and physical stance, it prevents your body from developing familiarity. Moreover, it is fun and engaging. There are new moves to learn and new positions to master everyday and every rank structure. There are new people to meet with and compete against, everyday.

Further, martial arts gives more holistic health benefits than any other form of exercise. Martial arts for instance, builds anaerobic capacity and endurance similar to sprinting or long-distance running. It also builds strength. Thus, you can run a marathon with the endurance of a long-distance runner but the runner cannot manipulate his/her weight and overpower an opponent like you can!

An easy way to understand how focused concentration can change lives, is to think of the term “focus” as an acronym. **F.O.C.U.S** is thus the ability to Follow One Course Until Successful. And isn't that the basic mantra of achieving just about any goal in life? You'll agree it is.

From achieving simple personal goals to excelling in school, finishing projects within deadlines or running a successful organization – you need focus and concentration in every walk of life.

“But does focus and concentration need learning?” That's a valid question and the shorter answer is “Yes.”

For a more detailed answer, consider this –

1) In today's day and age, you are surrounded with nearly thrice as many distractions as your parents. Similarly, as technology grows, your children will have more distractions than you. *Focus and concentration are no innate qualities. Today's circumstances make it more difficult to cultivate them.*

2) In today's fast-paced world, you have everything, but time for the simple pleasures of life. *Doesn't it make sense to get things done in an efficient, speedy manner and make time for the people you love?* 3) Competition, even in younger academic circles has escalated to cut-throat levels now. *You don't just have to be good. You have to be better than the rest.* And you need focus, concentration plus self-discipline to handle the ups and downs of life. I'm sure you can agree with that!

Turn your actions into concentrated practices with martial arts training

I was never a “natural” athlete. I made whatever luck I had in athletics. I took the time to learn karate. I paid my dues in concentration and sweat. And that is how I became a world champion

– Chuck Norris.

Martial Artist Chuck Norris, lists hard work and concentration as the two key factors that made him a world champion. Confidence is the key ingredient of success in not just sports, but everything else. No

fine work can in fact, be accomplished without focus, concentration and self-discipline.

This is where martial arts comes in. With martial arts training you can:

- Tame those pesky distractions that creep up everywhere
- Lengthen your attention span
- Learn how to concentrate on only the task at hand and with solid laser focus
- Optimize your sensory reactions – Research reveals that the sensory environment around a person affects their ability to focus and concentrate on a single thing. The more complex the environment, the more difficultly you'll face in staying focused.
- With martial arts, you can train your brain to optimize its reactions to the sensory environment around you, such that focus and concentration increase. Thus, with martial arts training, you can say hello to improved cognitive processing and welcome new levels of focus.
- Set-up an optimal learning environment for yourself and the children – Martial arts training will help you understand your attention and neurological problems if any. You will learn which sensory factors impair focus and can eliminate them at home or work, to create a high-quality learning environment.
- Turn the newly learned cognitive, sensory and concentration skills into permanent habits

And achieve success in class, at work and at home with your laser focused mind! Who knew martial arts could help you find your zen!

Chapter 8: Manage your Stress With Martial Arts

You know what stress really is? A silent killer – nothing more, nothing less. Stress sure takes a toll on your mood and overall mental health. But did you know that it physically wears down your body too? Stress can in fact, turn fatal when allowed to grow freely. To understand the ill-effects of this silent killer, it's imperative to understand the body's stress response.

What stress does to your body

The fight-or-flight response of your body, which is talked about frequently in the media, is a very real emergency response your body makes when faced with immediate danger. While you feel the palpitation in your head, you don't "feel" the activation of all key stress-response systems in your body, which is why stress is a silent killer.

In a typical emergency response, adrenaline rushes throughout your body. Heart begins pumping blood at a faster rate, quickening your heartbeat. Blood pressure rises. Your breathing becomes shallow. Peripheral blood vessels will contract. Muscles will tighten. Stomach tightens. All intestinal processes, including digestion shut down completely.

These responses are however, are meant to be very short-term. They are *emergency* responses after all. The body cannot sustain itself like this for longer periods of time. However, these emergency responses stay "on" in the case of stress, till you eliminate the stress altogether. Thus, the daily work stress, relationship stress or even the headache of driving back home in huge traffic, causes your stress response to switch on.

Your body sends low response for low-level stress, but it still sends a response. Over time, persistent stress response leads to depletion of essential minerals and vitamins from your body. The internal lining of your digestive system becomes destroyed because of constant adrenaline pumping through the system. Fatty deposits on blood vessels increase, causing a whole range of deep-rooted physical problems.

Now that you know how catastrophic stress is for your health and well-being, take a moment to think of the different everyday things that stress you out. Done? Now answer this – how sure are you of your stress management tactics? Are you 100 percent sure they're good enough to protect you from all the problems listed above and more? Martial Arts assist's both children and adults with stress management.

Stress is a choice. Make the right one with martial arts

Martial arts teaches you 100-percent reliable techniques to relax your mind and let go of things that worry you. It connects you to your inner, peaceful self and teaches how to examine yourself, everyday situations and others, with compassion instead of criticism. You learn how to understand your body's pattern of stress and tension. You learn how to let go of those patterns and reach within yourself for inner healing.

You find your inner motivation to make healthy choices when responding (either physically, emotionally or mentally) to things that distress you. In a 1992 study of Jin P. entitled *Efficacy of Tai Chi, Brisk Walking, Meditation, and Reading on Reducing Mental and Emotional Stress*, it was revealed that a single session of martial arts training (taijiquan in particular), helped participants feel less stressful immediately after suffering a stressful experience.

With martial arts training you can:

- Improve your mood instantly
- Be happier now and in the longer run – When you bid farewell to stress, you bid farewell to irritability, frustration, impatience, depression, stomach issues, anxiety, anger, insecurities and relationship problems.
- Be healthier physically – From relatively simpler stress manifestations like headaches, common cold, nausea, pain, vomiting, constipation, heartburn, acid reflux, diarrhea to more complex problems like heart diseases and certain types of cancers – stress management cures all.

- Be healthier mentally – You reduce your risk of developing emotional and mental disorders, like anxiety, panic attacks and phobias. I've taught many students who reduced their level of medication and in many situations have completely stopped-with approval from their doctor.
- Live longer!

Chapter 9: Increased Socialization Skills

Considering we're all social animals, there's no doubt in just how important social skills are for leading a happy and content life in society. Sociologists theorize that socialization is how culture is learned. Socialization is how individuals develop personality and learn how to adjust to the different roles of life.

In addition, it fulfills three primary goals. A) Socialization teaches impulse control to individuals and assists in the development of a conscience. B) It helps cultivate shared sources of value and meaning. C) It prepares the younger ones (the new generation) to perform certain social roles, which can be learned only through observation and active participation in social settings.

Socialization is especially important for children

Socialization is critical for children because it essentially converts them from newborn biological beings to social beings. Children with social skills grow into pleasant adults. Those without, often struggle with social awkwardness that translates into an array of problems in adulthood. Children who socialize learn the guidelines of social behavior. They learn how to play the different educational, professional, economic, political and religious roles later in life.

Individuals who do not learn social skills early in life, can learn it as adults as well. But it becomes more difficult for them because they have already developed their basic values and personal philosophies. Similarly, in children with early development of social skills, socialization becomes ingrained in their personal life philosophy. They need to expend less energy and mental power in abiding by our social and legal norms, than those who learn the skills later in life.

Why martial arts is your number one teacher of social skills

Contrary to the popular belief, the primary focus in martial arts is *not* perfecting artists' fighting techniques. No it isn't. Not at all. Victory and defeat are not even in the minds of martial arts masters when they impart knowledge of this ancient form of discipline. Yes you read that right!

So what is the primary focus you ask? It is developing character in each and every martial artist present in the class. And this is what makes martial arts the best way of learning social skills, not just for the kids, but also adults.

- **Martial arts teaches respect**

Martial arts shows no tolerance of rudeness, contempt and disrespect. Martial artists learn early that social living is all about respect, loyalty and understanding. Simple activities like bowing in front of their fellow students, instructor, master, or in front of other martial artists and waiting patiently for the next command teach them how to show (and simultaneously receive) respect from others. Being polite, respectful and well-mannered becomes a way of life for martial artists, making them well-liked and well-linked members of the society. It is not uncommon to see martial artists bowing to each other outside of their martial arts school.

- **It promotes good behavior inside and outside the dojo**

Not only do martial artists learn how to obey parents, teachers and mentors, they also learn how to resolve conflicts without violence (*Yes that's right – martial artists are taught to use violence as the last resort only! Understandably therefore, they are more likely to be non-violent than average people in a conflict*), make better decisions, avoid peer pressure to do wrong things and be more confident. They tend to get along better in school, with teachers, at home and as an adult at work.

Martial arts instructors instill general goodwill and camaraderie between all martial artists, further promoting good behavior, team spirit and cooperation. These positive qualities radiate in their demeanor, making them a crowd favorite.

- **Martial arts gives the confidence to be social**

Isn't it easier to be social, make friendships and be open to others when you feel better about yourself? It sure is. Martial artists learn to grow out of their timidness, shyness and insecurities and be more outgoing. They develop confidence, find themselves worthy of praise, admiration and love, and are quick to win others over with good behavior. Martial arts is in fact so effective that children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism and a range of other conditions that impair their social skills, find great success with martial arts. Teachers, parents and community members around the world see the positive impact, change and ability to grow in the right direction of those attending a martial arts school.

So we've covered how martial arts ingrains the value of respect in you, making you more polite, well-behaved and respectful of others. But, that's not even the best part! The single, most beneficial thing you learn from martial arts is how to respect the most important person in your life – *you!*

And why is that important?

Well, for several reasons that can be summed up into a single word – happiness. Self-respect fosters self-acceptance, self-love and high self-esteem. Each of the three feelings in turn, impact different aspects of your life, making you feel better, lighter and happier.

No more dragging yourself down or beating yourself up over every small mistake or setback. No more making mountains out of molehills. No more putting out fires that don't exist. No more self-loathing or self-sabotage. No more neediness. No more the longing to find attention and validation from others. No more daily drama in life. Just peace, happiness and tranquility as a martial artist.

Martial arts and the nine laws of self-respect

Self respect comes from understanding that you are in harmony with the real you. It comes from knowing that you have been faithful to that, which exists within yourself. Since martial arts focuses on building character, strengthening spirit, attaining greater consciousness of your own self and acting with courage, knowing you have done what is right, it is one of the best ways to instill self-respect.

With martial arts training, you learn how to:

1. **Love yourself** – You cultivate bravery, sincerity, wisdom and benevolence through regular martial arts training. You built an immovable mind. You develop confidence in your own assessment of situations and subsequent decisions. These help you love yourself and respect your choices more.
2. **Be self-reliant** – You put yourself in-charge of your own safety and have the confidence to go about your daily life without the help of others.
3. **Be true to your inner self** – Martial arts channels the energies of your body, mind and soul into one unified life force that resonates with your personal values. You will have the courage to be who you are, without feeling pressured by peers.
4. **Take care of your appearance** – Martial arts teaches you to care for your body and fitness. You eat right, breathe right, sleep right. You use the correct posture. You keep yourself away from harmful substances.
5. **Rise above the need for acceptance** – You don't seek validation from others and are more at peace under your own skin. Martial arts teaches you that your acceptance is all that matters.
6. **Handle criticism** – Martial arts removes sensitivity to criticisms and unfavorable opinions. It teaches you how to detach yourself from the negative feelings and remain clam.
7. **Rise above jealousy** – You get stronger, better and faster with martial arts training. Petty insecurities and jealousy can touch you no more.
8. **Be goal-oriented, without the need for instant gratification** – Martial arts training gives you

the power to be driven by deep-seated values and not outwardly results. It also keeps you focused for longer time, helping you respect yourself for not being distracted.

9. **Be more forgiving of others** – With martial arts, you learn how to say no to violence. You learn how to walk away from difficult situations, not only physically, but also mentally.

All self-respect courses are centered around these nine teachings, which you learn in one go, with martial arts. As a bonus, you also get to enjoy the several health and physical fitness benefits of martial arts as well. But most of all, you learn to value yourself and respect yourself for the unique individual that you are.

A happy family. A Sunday afternoon. Innocent games in the family back yard. A phone call. Parents walk indoors. In the backyard – disarrayed toys. Signs of struggle. Missing child. *What could you have done differently?* As an instructor, I have been asked this question many times.

Child abductions have unfortunately become a very real and a very serious possibility of late. The backyard, the bus-stop, the bedroom – children are vanishing everyday at a sickening rate. The Justice Department states that teenagers are at the prime at-risk group of abduction by one or more strangers. The risk is present through elementary school ages and peaks at age 15.

What's worse is that abductions are only *one* part of the larger picture. Crime is high nationwide and you can't pinpoint any race, religion, or age-group to be 100-percent safe from the risk of being victimized, either directly, or indirectly, say after having witnessed a crime in action. Danger of being in the wrong place at the wrong time is as severe as the danger of being mugged, kidnapped, killed or taken advantage of. One shouldn't have a negative attitude on life, trust issues or concerns with leaving their home. However, as society grows and technology advances we see the reports every day that negatively impact people and frighten them. Have you watched the news recently? It can be scary!

Yet, most people know only two perceived methods of self-defense: a) loud screaming in the hopes of attracting enough attention from others, b) a 911 call.

Parents need to help their children be prepared but yelling and a call to 911 by itself isn't going to work. Adults need to be aware of situations that could occur in parking lots, elevators, car jacking, rape and so much more for themselves as adults. Martial Arts training will teach situational awareness and the ability to confidently defend ones self and their family. I am hoping you can see the benefits of training in an art. Situational awareness levels are a state of mind and a set of skills that can be "learned and earned" in a systematic manner and safe controlled environment in your local martial arts school.

Self-defense is the *only* defense that you can count on at all times

Self-defense training through martial arts empowers you (and the children) to take care of yourself

and others when in danger. It equips you with all the necessary skills and techniques to:

- Be acutely aware of the surroundings you are in-situational awareness
- Gauge malicious intent in other people by understanding body language
- Successfully escape a potentially dangerous situation using dialogue, reason and judgment
- Actively avoid physical confrontation for as long as possible
- Manage Bully style assaults
- Defend yourself against physical assault
- Awareness levels from the clueless mode to the catastrophic breakdown mode
- Attack to disarm or disengage the assaulter and overpower them
- Defend against armed and unarmed assaults

Martial arts teaches you different physical moves to render the enemy harmless, of course. But before that, it teaches you prevention, such as how to be aware of your surroundings, anticipate a conflict and escape it. The goal is to resort to physical defense only when *absolutely necessary*.

Martial arts... because you don't need a weapon. You *are one!*

Martial arts will get you in touch with your physical power. In addition, it also creates a stronger connection between your body and mind. Your reaction time and response rate become better, allowing you to make correct, timely decisions in unpredictable, mutable situations where people without training may make mistakes or completely collapse. You will be able to come up with the right prevention/protection tactic. You will also be able to implement the tactic promptly, and well within time.

This is because self-defense training in martial arts involves 5 basic distinct elements of emergency response. Your martial arts instructor may possibly break these down somewhat differently. However, each of these will be covered.

1. Quick critical thinking
2. Rapid threat assessment
3. Clever understanding of human behavior and group dynamics (if any)
4. Optimal use of force
5. Speedy planning, implementation and escape route

Plus, as a martial artist, you will constantly be learning, training and improving to stay at the top of your game! Best wishes on your journey.