

# **The Development of Wisdom through an Education in the Martial Arts**

By Master Derek Croley

Since the beginning of recorded time, the Martial Arts have been practiced by the spiritual teachers, political and military leaders, and nobility of most nations around the world. The leaders and protectors of society have been the people who have been charged with the responsibility of an education in the Martial Arts. In fact, the Martial Arts have been the cornerstone of teaching future leaders to be disciplined, to have self confidence, to be courageous yet patient and kind. These tools are required to develop one's self mentally, physically, and spiritually. The development of all aspects of the self leads to balance, which leads to awareness, which leads to wisdom.

The purpose of the martial arts is to teach the individual to truly know themselves. This occurs through the balance of the self and the development of internal harmony.

Let's discuss specifically how a proper education in the Martial Arts will help the practitioner develop balance, awareness, and wisdom. First, to become balanced and centered there must be a commitment to building strong character, to have integrity, and to be honest with yourself and others. Honesty is the first step in seeing what is actually there. Honesty with yourself is the key to discovering who and what you actually are. Honesty with others is the key to building strong, meaningful relationships to support you during the good times and bad. No one was ever successful without being able to build strong trusting relationships with others. If honesty is thinking and saying the truth, then integrity is doing it. A Martial Artist must always do everything possible to do what he or she thinks is right and to be a person of his or her word. Honesty and integrity are the cornerstones of the development of wisdom as these two traits are the most important in seeing truth and fact.

With this in mind, the next part of balance is the harmonization of the body, mind, and spirit. The Martial Arts are one of the few disciplines that one can pursue in which all three aspects of the self are developed. We train the body through various drills and exercises, forms, weapons training, sparring, applications of techniques, etc. All of which are designed to be a physical model for the student to focus all aspects of the self in the same place at the same time. How often have you had your body in one place, but were thinking about something completely different? Your mind was not with your body and who knows where your spirit was! During the practice of Martial Arts the first step is to develop the ability to have your mind focused on what your body is doing. By focusing the mind you begin to see the depth of your study. There are many lessons in the Martial Arts on a mental level alone: self defense applications, strategic thought, and the philosophical ramifications of a particular sequence. The Martial Arts are, in fact, a way to enhance your study of everything from physics to philosophy!

When your body and mind are aligned you are then opened up to spirit. Shifu Liu Chan Shan once told me that "a master of the martial arts is one who has the universe flowing through him while he is practicing his art. A Grand Master of the Martial Arts is one

who has the universe flowing through him all of the time.” Liu Chan Shan is my teacher in China. What he meant by having the universe flowing through you is that first you must be present and focused. Your body, mind, and spirit must be in the same place at the same time. This is important because there is no other place or time. The past is gone and the future has yet to arrive. When you become focused and balanced something amazing happens- you become not only one with yourself, but you become one with spirit. Through the disciplined, focused practice of the Martial Arts the advanced practitioner becomes one with everything, allowing the universe to flow through them.

The balance of the body, mind, and spirit then leads to awareness. Awareness comes from knowing yourself. This doesn't mean that you “fix” yourself- it means that you know yourself and accept yourself for who and what you are. When a person can do this they then have the ability to see themselves without judging. Balance makes the Martial Artist like a mirror- they only reflect what is actually there without judging, without altering anything to make it what they desire. From this balanced vision of what “is,” the Martial Artist becomes aware of a great many things that are hidden to the average person.

Therefore, awareness leads to wisdom. When one is able to look objectively and see the truth, one becomes wise. The Martial Arts develop wisdom via an education that is mental, physical, and spiritual. To develop wisdom you cannot take a week end class and call it quits, you can't even do a six month course and expect to reach anything near your full potential. Since it takes years to develop wisdom via discipline, a large part of a Martial Arts education is commitment and perseverance. Nothing worth having ever comes without hard work. Remember that having a good attitude and putting forth your best effort on a consistent basis is what will make you successful in your aim to achieve wisdom and mastery.

Should you seek to become a student of the Martial Arts, the art is not so important as the teacher and his or her understanding of what is being taught. The teacher must use kind confidence and positive reinforcement to push students to achieve- he or she should not be cruel. Also, though there is an obvious and necessary physicality to training, the staff at the school must do everything possible to ensure the safety of the students involved. When researching a teacher I strongly recommend that you do a criminal back ground check- especially if you are seeking lessons for your children.

There are really only two aspects of the Martial Art. These are life philosophy or “Do” and physical application or “Jutsu”. Martial Arts are not sports. Sports are fine and in many ways beneficial- but they are nothing remotely like an education in the Martial Arts. Though some schools choose to practice sports, this should not be the most important thing that they do. All Martial Arts are a way of personal development and growth, even a way to stop others from hurting you- preferably in a nonviolent manner. Winning and losing is irrelevant- only the development of the self is a worthy goal.

*Master Derek Croley is the Founder and President of Croley's Martial Arts Center, a 6<sup>th</sup> Degree Black Belt in Martial Arts, a certified Tai Chi Instructor, and is the founding co-chairman of the National ASTM Martial Arts Educational Industry Safety Committee. He has taught hundreds of people how to become Black Belt Leaders, and currently resides in Asheville with his beautiful wife- they have had three children. He can be contacted at [dctai@bellsouth.net](mailto:dctai@bellsouth.net).*