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## **Self Mastery -the essence of Budo.**

( Part One)

During his/her growth from beginner to master grade, the student of Karate-do has passed through many different phases in his/her understanding of the art. In the earlier stages the student is focused, for the most part on developing external (physical) power. The purpose of his training may be focused on competition and winning medals, thus winning over others. All these things may prove to be necessary experiences on the path of Karate. However, if the purpose of training in Karate stays focused upon these things, then the interest is centred on results and not on Karate itself.

The difference between many other sports and Karate is, that it must involve the whole being of the individual and therefore it will affect the foundation of his character. If we believe that the object of Karate training is to win medals, or that titles and fancy diplomas confer the highest state of recognition, we mistake the low for the high and an illusion for the truth. The purpose of practising any form of Budo is not victory over others, but victory over oneself.

### **Striving for perfection.**

For the sincere martial artist the “Path of Learning” is endless. It is a never-ending path of self-discipline and self-control. The greatest benefit derived from training in Karate therefore does not only come from achieving technical excellence, a healthy physique, or the acquisition of fighting skills (which one hopes never to use), but it comes from the EFFORT we put into the training and the sincere desire and dedication to strive for perfection.

A master is not somebody that is perfect in technique and character, but it is a person that has spent a lifetime trying to achieve perfection. The skills of Karate, like the skills of character will never be perfected. It is the willingness and the constant striving for perfection both in character and technical skills that makes a Master.

### **The essence of Budo lies within our own being. Therefore bring out what is already deep inside of your being.**

To advance upon the” Path” and to understand the deeper meaning of Budo, the sincere and earnest Karate-ka will have to face his own inner nature. In other words, he has to turn his attention within. Whereas before he had his attention focused mainly upon the external practice of Karate, he now looks for the guiding light within. Previously, he looked for guidance from an experienced teacher (should he be fortunate enough to have one), but now he strives with the aid of whatever light he can find within himself. Through ardent and diligent daily training he may discover whatever truth is within him. The guiding force in this process (and a process indeed it is) is the ideal of Budo!

The most valuable thing any individual can possess is an exalted ideal towards which he continually aspires. This ideal will mould his thoughts and feelings, and inform the path of his life. One should strive to set the ideal as high as possible.

## **Make your aspirations high. They become the seeds of power in your life.**

As the power within a tiny seed determines the form, even to the smallest detail of the mightiest tree, so is the power within us a mere seed of unlimited possibilities, only limited by an undeveloped imagination. The fact that we can conceive the ideal, makes it ours.

If we follow our highest ideals day after day, year after year, we will eventually grow into the likeness of the things we contemplate. Through ever keeping our ideal we will grow towards it and what we long for today, we shall be tomorrow.

Prince Gautama, who became the Buddha, is supposed to have said: *AS A MAN THINKETH SO HE IS!* In other words, we have the power to transform ourselves. Therefore it matters very much what we think.

## **The power of thought.**

Thought is a tremendous force underlying everything we do. Every conscious act is preceded by thought. Thought is the parent of our actions. A strong thought will eventually result in a strong action. Thoughts that dominate our minds will also dominate our actions, and to a great extent our feelings. Repetition of thoughts will eventually result in repetition of actions, repeated action will crystallize themselves into habits. The sum total of our habits will form our character and personality. Therefore, if we wish to change our character we will have to change our thoughts.

If thought is parent to our actions, habits, feelings and our character, then it is first of all necessary that we practice *thought control*. Because we identify ourselves with our thoughts and feelings they have enslaved us. We are constantly being thrown hither and thither by our thoughts and feelings. In the words of Ralph Waldo Trine: *“Man therefore becomes the victim of the tides, where he should be their Master!!”*

However there is no need for this. We have the capacity to take control again. The first step towards control of thought is the actual *realization* that we are enslaved by our own habits. Over many years we have acquired many habits and these habits have become a powerful force in our life -sometimes for good and sometimes for bad. Whenever one has created a habit one does a certain thing in a certain way and it becomes easier to do the thing in the same way the next time, and the next and the next. One simply repeats the act because it requires no effort, or no effort worth speaking of. But to change direction and to do the opposite would require a lot more effort.

So therefore, when we try to take control we can expect strong resistance, especially in the beginning. The effort to control thought, will at the start result in many failures. It is a difficult task indeed.

The past shows us that difficulties are no excuse for dejection, much less for despair. We must expect strong resistance from the mind. From our Karate training we have learned that it does not matter how many times we fall, *-what matters is how many times we raise ourselves!*

We must remember that apparent failure is the result of previous efforts. If one does not try anything, one does not fail at anything. We must believe with strong conviction in our innate power to make progress.

*The question is not, what the conditions in our lives are, but with what attitude do we meet those conditions that we find there.*

We also know that with each earnest effort to take control of our lives, that each following effort will make it a little easier to reach our goal. This is where the many years of karate practice can prove to be of tremendous help in the struggle of character building. The Karate-ka is used to training, he has tested his spirit and hardened his body through many, many years of physical training. He has not succumbed to failure, he has conquered physical pain, fatigue, mental boredom and many other hardships along the way.. Neither is he intimidated by the immensity of the task, nor by the many failures to come.

One could say he is well prepared for the battle.

*Remember, there are no barriers to success but those which exist within yourself.*

## **Karate –the constant test of Self.**

One learns little unless one is willing to persist in boring and for the time being, apparently useless attempts to change the focus of attention.

Anyone commencing to learn a new Kata cannot expect to master the techniques and perform the Kata at first effort. He must not therefore conclude, nor does one conclude, that the particular kata cannot be performed by him, or for that matter by anyone else. One begins to practice the Kata daily over and over again, diligently. With each training session one improves, slowly at first but more surely with each practice. There comes a time where one's body responds and co-ordinates with the movements of the mind because one has an idea, an inner vision, as to how one wants the Kata to be performed.

The inner vision and the outer form must synchronize. At first there is no harmony between the mind and the body, -between the performer and the performance nothing but discord. One stumbles through the techniques like a beginner student. But after a long period of persistent effort, one finally starts to master the form. The mind and the body as well as the breath move as a coherent whole.

Eventually the diligent student, after years and years of tenacious practice becomes "one" with the form. The "outer" Kata becomes a reflection of the "inner" Kata. When this occurs, the mind is set free. It does not struggle with the form anymore. Once the mind is set free, the spirit can express a greater degree of vitality through the form. The performer and the performance become as ONE. What we see then is skill in action; in other words, perfection born out of imperfection.

## **Man develops from within.**

It is only through constant and persistent effort of practicing concentration over a long period of time that one can expect some small degree of success. One is using as it were a new set of muscles.

So it is in the use of thought power. Thought power can only be increased by steadfast and persistent exercise. Through our Karate training we know that muscular development depends on the exercise of the muscles we already possess, so does mental development depend on the exercise of the mind already ours.

In the practice of thought control, the martial artist can derive great benefit from the practice of *concentration* and *meditation*. Concentration means holding the mind to a single idea at will. The mind can either be turned outwards to the world of senses or to reflect the world of experience, or inwards to reflect the realities of a spiritual being.

"Outer and Inner": There is in our minds a division between the two. As long as we make a distinction between the two, we are not in tune with our true nature. The purpose of meditation is to prepare the personality so that it is able to reflect and express its relationship with the "*True Inner Self*."

The goal of the sincere and dedicated martial artist should lead him to the realization that both within and without are one.

By continuously aspiring towards an exalted ideal, there will come a time when our character will eventually become one with our inner ideal. That which you have attained by character building, will soon reflect itself in your outer life.

Therefore by pursuing the path of Karate-do in conjunction with the path of meditation, the true man of Budo measures life by quality, not by quantity. He does not look for wealth, position or power over others, nor the meaningless recognition of his name in what people call fame.

*A man who wars against himself and wins the battle can do it only in the knowledge that in war he is doing the one thing, which is worth doing.*

Karate training should of course be practised as a fighting art. However, it is easy for a stronger man to beat a weaker person and there will come a time when even the strongest fighter will be defeated by someone better. But if the art is used for self-improvement as well as character building, it becomes a lifelong pursuit that is truly worthwhile.