

Martial Arts

The martial arts are widely perceived in North America as a form of sport. Parents enroll children in karate classes to instill a sense of discipline. Adults train in martial arts to learn self-defense techniques. Many in the western world strive to obtain a black belt, thinking that this is the pinnacle of their training and education. In eastern countries, the martial arts are much more than sport. They are history, culture, philosophy, and respect.

The term "martial arts" is used as a general categorization of fighting systems that originated in ancient times. If you were to fully review martial arts, you would find a vast array of systems; each with its own set of techniques that have been perfected over the ages. For the most part, martial arts do not encourage the use of weapons in combat, though exceptions do exist.

In studying martial arts, you'll find the earliest form originated in China more than 2500 years ago. Some philosophies hold that martial arts systems were adapted into various forms in Japan and other eastern countries. Another school of thought believes that these other countries developed their own original styles and systems of martial arts. Unfortunately, their origins were not well documented and therefore largely unknown.

Images of martial arts, as North Americans see them, were conjured up by Hollywood. Filmmakers will have us believe that martial arts are part of the Oriental mystique, and that kung fu, judo, karate and tae kwon do belong exclusively to the Oriental countries. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth.

Martial arts have evolved from countries around the globe. For every person practicing tae kwon do, there is someone doing a French form of kickboxing called "savate". For every Judo, there is a sambo.

Through the centuries, people the world over have developed a range of martial arts systems. While each is distinct in its own way, there are many similarities. The primary function of martial arts is a means of effective self-defense during combat. Watch a martial arts performer, and you will often see a blur of arms and legs. But true martial artists don't just flail around to punch and kick. They use their bodies to execute single or multiple pre-choreographed movements that have been perfected over time. When executed properly, these moves can be lethal weapons in their own right.

Practicing martial arts, in any of its forms, requires a high degree of skill. The routines and techniques that students perfect over the years form a fighting vocabulary. Students with larger vocabularies become more highly skilled fighters. Each routine takes a great deal of time to perfect, and true martial artists have a large repertoire to choose from. In times of need, the skill of the artist depends on his or her ability to use the right technique at the appropriate time.

Of course, there is more to martial arts than the perfect execution of movement. Martial arts were created for use in combat. Serious combat. For this reason, success at martial arts means training and using your mind, as well as your body. Invariably, every form of martial arts is characterized by a very conscious application of force, utilized to achieve maximum effect.

Learning karate, or judo, or tae kwon do is one thing. Studying the martial arts is something altogether different. If you wish to be a true student of the martial arts, you must concentrate with your mind while you perform with your body.