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TAE KWON DO/A TOOL FOR PEACE OR DESTRUCTION?



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"Once you set your mind with enthusiasm and persistency, nothing is impossible." For the students of a Midwest tae kwon do instructor, the school slogan is only the beginning of a hybrid program for physical and mental success.

THE SELF PROGRAM

winning over yourself

by Lee Rutherford

When describing Jay Hyon, many suitable adjectives apply—successful, articulate, positive, dedicated. One word, however, fits most aptly—unorthodox.

Unlike most tae kwon do instructors, 42-year-old Hyon, who owns six dojo in Minneapolis, Minnesota, stresses the low-level attack and teaches his art primarily as a means of self-defense. He says he changed many techniques after years of research simply because "one works better than the other, and I'm not afraid of change."

And Hyon does not mince words when talking about tournaments.


"Winning a tournament," he says, "doesn't mean you are the winner in reality. It's just simple points for the self-defense version. It doesn't mean you can defend yourself any better than any other karate man who didn't compete in the tournament. In the street, anything goes. The techniques are entirely different. You can kick low or high and sometimes get more effective results.

"I never refuse anyone who wants to go to tournaments but I don't push them. I can teach them to fight in a tournament but it is not the whole thing—only a small part of karate. I try to teach an overall philosophy of martial arts and techniques so the student can be a complete martial artist. The philosophy is that you know winning over yourself is more important than winning over someone else physically. So that's why I teach meditation and self-improvement."

When talking about tae kwon do, his schools and his students, Hyon's conversation constantly revolves around the concept of the mind's potential. His strong belief in the power of the mind is summed up by his school's slogan: Once you set your mind with enthusiasm and persistency, nothing is impossible. And new students are offered three introductory classes which emphasize that they will work out their minds as well as their bodies.

"I explain to beginning students," he says, "that they can learn more easily through positive thinking and a positive attitude toward karate. If you think, 'That's very hard. I can't do it,' then it becomes very hard. The more you think, the more your muscles become tense. So I say, 'Don't think. Just do it.' And they do it. Your muscles have the capability of doing it. Watching your movements is your thinking. That's a positive attitude."

During the second lesson, Hyon discusses good posture. If the student uses good posture while sitting and walking, Hyon says, "It is eventually your natural way of rejuvenating your



Tae kwon do instructor Jay Hyon stresses low-level attack and teaches his art primarily as a means of self-defense, emphasizing "control over one's own mind."



Photos by Ed Ikuta

whole system.” And the third introductory class stresses meditation.

“What I try to do,” says Hyon, “is give the prospect the whole picture. We don’t misrepresent anything. We give them enough information before—about the physical and mental. I

haven’t seen anyone who doesn’t like the mental part of it.”

Hyon’s students meditate before each class by mentally repeating the school slogan.

“Basically,” says Hyon, “meditation is dwelling upon something. In Zen they count breathing. But the dwelling-upon is

THE SELF PROGRAM

most important. We mentally repeat the slogan in a relaxed situation. It is not formal concentration, because it is natural. You don't use too much energy.

"When meditating, thoughts come in constantly. I don't think anyone can blot these out entirely. So you have to let them enter and then leave through the other side. When you realize you are thinking of something else, return to mentally repeating the sentence. That way it is easy. You can lie down or sit in a comfortable chair for twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the afternoon.

"I emphasize meditation for karate because it improves perceptions, makes your body more agile and improves your reflexes and stamina. That has all been tested. And it is also good health-wise, because our central nervous system, muscles and breathing are all connected. There is no way you can relax without relaxing your muscles. You are relaxing your auto and central nervous systems. You will see the difference right away. Your breathing changes. And sometimes you feel you are not breathing at all because you have become calm. You expend less oxygen and your pulse rate goes down. Tests show it is a stage deeper than deep sleeping.

"Suppose there is a river," Hyon continues. "Meditation is the boat you use to cross it. In other words, meditation takes you from one stage to another—from beta brain waves to alpha brain waves."

"You Don't Have To Be Insecure"

Hyon, who also has studied transcendental meditation and EST training, advocates what he calls a "more direct mind control." He hastens to add that the concept is one of "control over one's own mind" rather than "control over someone else's mind." Through mind control, Hyon says, "We can project ourselves to be a certain way by visualizing it mentally.

"I tested it myself," he says. "I am getting older and I don't jump and kick as much as I used to. And sometimes my back hurts. But you can correct that through meditation. I set a goal and mentally visualize myself jumping and kicking. And then I came to school and did it. That's better than jumping and kicking one hundred times a day for three weeks without thinking. If you mentally project, you really see yourself doing it. You program yourself—your brain and your whole system.

"Like psychologists say, we only use ten percent of our mental potential," says Hyon. "Einstein said we use only five percent. I am trying to lift my potential so it can control my physical ability. For instance, we know a mother can lift a truck that is on top of her child. Medically, you say, the adrenal cortex generated excess adrenaline. But the potential is there. I think by mentally improving, cultivating and lifting your potential, you can do it."

Hyon, an avid golfer, also mentally projects his golf game.

"When I visualize, I shoot better," he says, "simply because my muscles are relaxed. If you are tight, you don't think straight. You don't see what really is going on. You only see what you think is going on—an entirely different thing."

Occasionally, however, Hyon says his "ego mind" sabotages his mental projection.

"Once when I was playing golf," he says, "I was four under par on the tenth hole. I was very calm and projected the whole game. I was relaxed and swinging good. But then I started

thinking of breaking the course record. My ego mind had popped out. So I only shot two under par for eighteen holes. So you have to get rid of your ego mind and concentrate on what's at hand—the present—no past or future."

The youngest of five sons in a family of middleclass landowners, Hyon first studied tae kwon do in North Korea, where he was born. A physically weak youth, he hoped to develop self-discipline and strength. When the Communists gained power, the Hyon holdings were divided among their tenant farmers. The Hyon's, however, worked the land with their former employees until the Chinese entered the Korean conflict. They then moved south to Seoul, where Hyon continued his study of tae kwon do and earned a degree in chemical engineering. After graduating, Hyon emigrated to the United States and began work as an engineer.

While visiting friends in Minneapolis, Hyon discovered most residents were unfamiliar with tae kwon do. He decided it was an ideal location for a studio and, in 1968, gave up engineering to build up his schools.

"I had a very hard time," Hyon recalls. "In 1965, I was using someone's judo school three days a week. And by the summer of 1968, I had saved only one thousand dollars."

Hyon's hard work obviously paid off, however, since he now owns a chain of six studios in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area.

Each school is operated by one full-time instructor, who is fully responsible for it. Hyon communicates with his instructors at weekly meetings during which they exchange and discuss ideas.

Hyon devised an unusual contract system for his schools.

"After students attend the first three introductory lessons," Hyon says, "we discuss how much they want to involve themselves in the art. We set up a goal for students. We give them the black belt, purple belt or green belt course. In other words, you might sign up for a purple belt. That will be your goal. But you only pay for one year. If you work very hard and get purple belt before one year is over, you still get one year at the school. And if you don't make purple belt in one year, you just keep coming free until you get it.

"So the set-up is ideal. If we charged thirty or forty dollars a month forever, you'd end up paying a lot of money. Some may learn fast and some slowly, but they pay the same. And you don't have to hurry to get promoted. Of course, they have to earn the belt. I think that's the best program you can offer. You set goals for the student to achieve and it also helps business."

"I Used To Be Very Greedy"

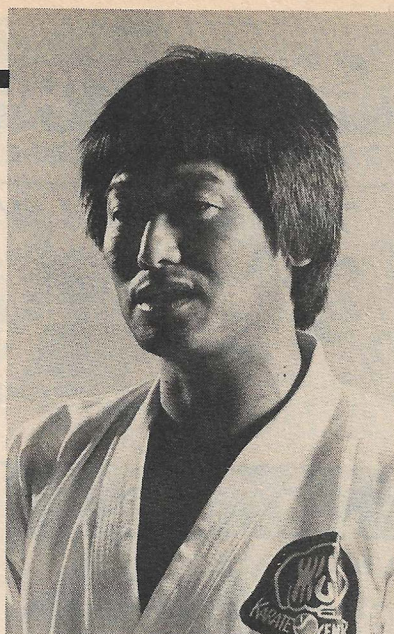
Even though Hyon, who is married and the father of a one-year-old boy, stresses the importance of the mind in martial arts, he also says it must be coupled with physical activity.

"Of course, if you do only meditation," he says, "it will not do any good, because you have to use physical movement. That is why it is so good in karate. You can combine physical exercise, meditation and mind control."

And once again Hyon is talking enthusiastically about his favorite subject.

"High blood pressure can be cured easily through medita-

"Winning over yourself is more important than winning over someone else physically. That's why I teach meditation and self-improvement."



tion," he says. "And you don't have to sleep as much because it helps you relax and recover your tiredness. So I, my instructors and my students sleep less and work more. Not only does meditation give you physical enthusiasm, but your mental attitude—your thinking—changes. You have a more positive attitude toward whatever you do. You enjoy every actual minute."

When asked how he would handle an insecure or physically handicapped student, Hyon cites the following experience:

"I told the student, 'You don't have to be insecure,' " he says. "Don't listen to what anyone else says because if you do you're only hurting yourself. Think you are perfect. Be confident of what you are. If you think you are okay and can accept that, there is no problem."

And what about Hyon himself? Does he attribute any personal changes to his concept of the potential of the mind?

"I never get tired anymore," he replies. "I'm energetic so I do a lot of work. And I never get bored. I have had tremendous results with the energy flow of my body. I really and truly enjoy every minute. There are people who are negative and gripe about everything. They will probably get high blood pressure and die sooner."

"I used to be very greedy. I wanted to make a lot of money to prove something. But now money is not as important to me as it used to be. When you die, you don't take it with you. As long as you have enough to live, then that's fine."

"I am a lot happier than I was a few years ago—even one or two years ago. I have improved greatly since I became involved in self-improvement. I don't have any insecurity and I say whatever I want. If you call me stupid, I will not say anything. But if I call you stupid, you will be mad. If you think I am stupid, that's fine. That's what you think. But it doesn't bother me. The enlightened person has no hope or expectation."

"You have to accept me as I am," Hyon continues. "So I'm not conscious about anything. It gives me freedom to react—to react as I am. Most people act as if they have a cover over their faces. They talk a certain way but are entirely different inside. But now I am the same—inside and outside."

"Now, I am just what I am. And I accept what I am."



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