

Life Style Martial Arts

By Kenneth Kirsner

People often wonder why I continue to train in martial arts. I am a 59 year old man, a professor, an anesthetist, a lawyer too. They think it is for self-defense, for protection.

It is for self-defense and for protection. But not for what many think. Certainly it is possible that I would have to use my hands and feet to defend myself. And Chayon Ryu trains me for that. But it is unlikely. Like any smart martial artist, I avoid dangerous people and dangerous places whenever possible. I avoid rather than confront. I do not go around spoiling for a fight.

But life brings us dangers not only of the action movie variety. It brings us the everyday dangers. Stress and all that stress brings. Part of what Chayon Ryu brings us is a balanced exercise program. Class always begins with meditation and stretching. Then we go through our basic movements, our forms, and for those of us who have trained for longer periods, more advanced movements. Scientific studies are very clear that exercise increases health and longevity, heart strength is also brain strength, it is good for the mind and the body. It helps one maintain fitness, weight, it improves one's ability to sleep well and to think well.

There is one other very important physical attribute that Chayon Ryu teaches. That is how to fall. Hopefully I will never be in a physical fight for the rest of my life. As I am not a policeman or soldier, this is possible. But I will fall down. Everyone falls down and as we age our balance declines. Many older people fall and break bones, hit their heads. Falls cause many injuries and even deaths every year. I have taken care of many patients over the years who have severe injuries from falling. But when one learns how to fall and practices it regularly, one can prevent injuries. I know for myself that in the past few years I have fallen several times, whether when running for exercise and tripping on an obstruction or while walking the dogs or going hiking. Falls are very frequent in wet areas like kitchens and bathrooms. But every time I have fallen since training in Chayon Ryu, the practiced method of falling just comes out. The force of the fall is distributed across my body, my head is held up and does not hit the ground. I stand right up and brush myself off and smile because I know that my training has paid off.

But just as Chayon Ryu is more than just self-defense, punching and kicking, it is more than just an exercise program. I work in an operating room administering anesthesia to patients undergoing surgery. I also teach students my craft and help them learn how to administer anesthesia. Both are very stressful. One must be alert or patients may suffer. At critical times it is imperative that one be able to control one's emotions and think clearly. One must be humble and be able to see that he is not the most important person in the room.

Properly taught martial arts, like Chayon Ryu, teach humility and patience. One goes through the process of learning. One must empty his mind and be humble in order to progress to the next step. One must be receptive to being taught, to learning from his teachers, his training partners and his students also.

Sparring in Chayon Ryu is a great example of how one learns control, patience and humility. Initially students tend to think that it is a contest. It is not. Students think that black belts must be the most dangerous sparring partners; on the contrary they are the safest as they have learned control. It is not being the hardest puncher that gains one rank and recognition in sparring. It is the ability to be patient and controlled. When working with a lower ranking student, one may be punched or kicked, even a little harder than one should have been. It takes patience and control to understand that there is no ill intent that one must respond with control and kindness and bring the sparring to an unemotional state where both training partners can learn.

In the operating room, in the classroom, in any workplace, events may occur that could cause one to become emotional. The patient's condition may become critical, one professional in the operating room may ask for drugs, or may need a procedure performed at once. Emotions may come out, people may raise their voices. The same control that lets one be a good sparring partner help one to be a good professional in the operating room. If a surgeon or nurse in the operating raises her voice because she needs something right away or because there is bleeding or some other problem with the patient, one must maintain control, one must be calm. When a student is counseled or graded and is not pleased with his grade or not receptive with criticism, he may become emotional. It is essential that the teacher not return that negative emotion, but be calm. This is what a true lifestyle martial art like Chayon Ryu teaches.

Respectfully submitted.

Kyo sa nim Kenneth Kirsner