**The Benefit of Practice**

Practitioners embrace martial arts for a variety of reasons. Some learn to defend themselves in order to defend against a physical attack. Others have an interest in competing. Those who learn the movements and mindfulness that are essential to the practice reap the most valuable benefits in the forms of physical and mental wellbeing.

Often, our first exposure to martial arts is the lure of the action movie. An innocent person is being accosted by an attacker. It’s through the Hollywood lens that the victim displays their martial art prowess and effortlessly thwarts the assailant. The reason for studying is simple; it’s often about defending yourself against the “bad guy.” It’s self-preservation against an outside assailant. Of course, the physical encounter is often exaggerated to entertain the viewer. In real life, however, physical attacks are often fast and brutal. Often, there are no winners. While the glamour of the big screen is highly seductive in attracting people to study martial arts, screen-charm is often not a good reason to pursue training.

Since the days of the Roman Gladiators, man has enjoyed the fierce thrill of combative martial arts. Interest was often generated by seeing the combatants display tremendous physical abilities. Spectators were enthralled by the pure excitement of competition and the primal psychological instinct for dominance. This coupled with a desire to win, an increasingly dominant trait in today’s competitive society, is a driving factor. Earning a belt or trophy becomes the end game. While martial competition and winning are important to some, more significant benefits of the practice are sometimes overlooked and diminished.

The greatest value of martial arts practice is in the form of self-preservation. Self-preservation starts with a healthy lifestyle and self-care. Being mindful of how to practice properly is paramount, so you are rewarded with good health. This strength carries over to every other aspect of your life. The great martial arts masters of old often stated that one could be practicing martial arts while performing ordinary day to day tasks. This meant that the masters of old were constantly reinforcing good healthy habits and “practicing” their martial arts constantly. It had nothing to do with specific techniques but more of a positive mental outlook, proper nutrition and a constant awareness of how they felt while they were still or while they were moving.

There are physical, psychological and social benefits to practicing martial arts. The practice transcends national borders, culture and religion. People from all over the globe find commonality because the practice is accessible to everyone who wishes to improve his or her lifestyle. Martial arts training first and foremost starts with self-protection and cultivation. These make up the cornerstones to advancement and are singularly the most important reasons for practice.

* Joseph G Bellone, March 2020