

Lessons in Mindfulness



Supporting the practice of serious martial artists

Lessons in Mindfulness



Body, Mind, and Spirit

*The study of martial arts is a path of personal growth, encompassing body, mind and spirit. **The Lessons in Mindfulness** program is designed to support and supplement your physical practice, to motivate you and inspire you on ever deeper levels.*

Freedom is born of self-discipline. The undisciplined man is a slave to his own weaknesses.

—Alan Valentine

Topic

Balance Through Discipline

External discipline

One of the greatest benefits of studying martial arts is greater self-discipline and self-control. From birth, discipline is a part of the human experience. Imposed on us by caring parents and relatives, discipline teaches us to make wise choices. Teachers, coaches, law enforcement officials, and other authority figures soon add their influence. External discipline is used frequently to obtain compliance in the military, prisons, religious orders or any regulated environment requiring specific behaviors. It can be an effective method to control individuals, but when the authority figure or consequence disappears, often we realize that the behavior was just being controlled rather than transformed, or repressed rather than rehabilitated.

Internal discipline

As we mature, we realize the importance of self-imposed discipline or internal discipline. For example, eating well and exercising usually maintains our health. Building a successful career demands discipline of our time. Financial success requires the discipline to save and invest regularly. In our culture, certain holidays and rituals inspire us to become more disciplined. Birthdays, our annual reminder of the passing of time, can be an opportunity to acknowledge what we have accomplished, as well as what we have not. Without a doubt, the most popular time of the year for assessing our lives and vowing change is January 1st. The beginning of a new year gives us a fresh slate for new resolutions, and millions of people participate in this annual ritual. But well over 90% of us give up on our sincere and heartfelt visions within months. This confirms the need for commitment, follow-through and good old fashioned self-discipline.

Continuous action

Start investing the time and energy needed to design the life you desire in great detail. Then take continuous action on that design, never stopping until you reach your goals. If you are thinking that this seems really hard, you are right. However, everything in life is hard. Being poor, sick or uneducated is difficult as well. You have a choice: Take control of your life, making it satisfying and rewarding, or allow circumstances and outside forces to determine your future, and ultimately, your life.

Shift...don't run

There is a saying, "Environment is stronger than will." This is a great truth, and as a student of the martial arts, you belong to a powerful environment which demands concentration, thrives on discipline, and pushes its students toward immense mental and physical growth. The challenge of such an intense pursuit is to keep everything in balance. How does one build a career, enjoy family and social life, maintain good health, achieve financial stability and grow spiritually at the same time?

Think of a man on a tight wire, thirty feet above the city. He never achieves absolute balance, but constantly shifts from side to side to maintain his position. You must continuously monitor your life, and adjust when necessary. Determine the best places to invest your time, energy and resources. If you run from one fire to the next all day, you become exhausted and completely unsatisfied. By disciplining your time, thoughts and behaviors, you feel organized and productive.

Something in human nature causes us to start slacking off at our moment of greatest accomplishment. As you become successful, you will need a great deal of self-discipline not to lose your sense of balance, humility, focus and commitment.

—Unknown

We must all suffer one of two things: The pain of discipline or the pain of regret and disappointment.

—E. James Rohn

Discipline is simply doing what you ought to do, even when you don't want to do it.

Balance and passion

A question that many people struggle with is, “How do I have balance and passion in my life at the same time?” The question suggests that the pursuit of a great passion requires total devotion of time and energy, causing the rest of your life to suffer. A great martial artist strives for balance and harmony in every aspect. Simplify your life and *spend* your time rather than *wasting* time. Learn to live in the moment and give your full attention to the *now*. Design your life to be harmonious with your deepest desires. When your time and energy move in the exact same direction, there is a congruency...a synergy to life. In short, discipline equals happiness.

Michael couldn't believe today was his thirtieth birthday. He could swear that just yesterday he was twenty-five. Although he had graduated from college and had a good job that showed promise, he appeared to be going nowhere fast. He was passed over time and time again for promotions. His work was sloppy, he came in late, and sometimes forgot meetings. His social life wasn't much better. He only worked out occasionally...just enough to remind him that he was really out of shape. Sometimes he became frustrated, but being an easy-going person, he didn't make much effort to change his bad habits.

That was until today. For some reason his thirtieth birthday was hitting Michael hard. Rather than celebrating, he found himself asking the hard questions. “Who am I? What is my life about? What am I supposed to be doing? What else is there?” He had always been spiritually open-minded and interested in different faiths. But, he had never really committed to any specific path of study.

Michael felt that he was standing at a crossroad. If he continued on the same path, he feared his life would be a bland existence. He decided to do something radical. He would take a leave of absence from work and travel—not for leisure, but to gain a better perspective on life and his place in the world.

Over the next year, Michael traveled in Asia, visiting different villages, doing odd jobs, sightseeing, and learning about the local people. In a remote area of Japan, he discovered an active Zen temple. He had explored many temples on his travels, but this temple did not allow tourists to enter their walls. He talked with some of the local people and discovered that a handful of monks and three or four layman lived and worked at the temple. All were under the guidance of Hiroshi, a great Zen master. Michael wanted to learn about their monastic life, so he arranged for an appointment with Hiroshi.

During the meeting, the master's calm presence was intriguing. He listened carefully to Michael's questions and spoke with gentle authority and assurance. When the hour ended, Michael felt compelled to spend more time with this amazing man. He blurted out, "Could I possibly become a student here?"

Surprised by the bluntness of his own question, Michael was embarrassed. The master replied calmly, "Michael, Zen is not a religion, it is a philosophy of life. Zen is a way of being that is in harmony with nature and all religious practices. This is not a quick and easy path. You appear sincere in trying to make progress, so I will accept you as a student under the following condition. For at least three years, you must live and work within our walls as a monastic. If you do not agree to this, I cannot help you."

**The more we
simplify our world,
the easier it is to
master.**

—Unknown

When balanced, one is capable of changing direction at any time. To live a balanced life, one must be anchored in that which is changeless.

Michael was surprised by the master's acceptance and also by the length of the commitment. Intuitively, he knew that this opportunity could change his life forever. If he rejected the offer, he would regret it for the rest of his life. He took a deep breath and accepted the opportunity. The master said, "Very good, we start tomorrow." He bowed and walked away, leaving Michael filled with excitement and wondering what he had just done. The next day, the master showed Michael where he would live, work, prepare his meals, and perform daily chores.

After about a month, the master met with Michael. "You seem to be settled in to our simple life. Now, your real training begins." The master took out a pen and paper, writing as he spoke. "You will rise at 4:30 a.m. Zazen sitting meditation is 5:00 a.m. We meet in the courtyard at 6:00 a.m. to practice martial arts for an hour. Breakfast is 7:00 a.m., and you begin your work at 8:00 a.m.

He handed Michael the paper and pen and said, "In as much detail as possible, write down your perfect day in fifteen minute increments. Repeat this for every day of the week." Michael took his time and carefully plotted out his week. When he was finished, the master said, "Good, this is your perfect week, day by day. Do not become attached to it as you will never have a day that follows this plan. The goal is to discipline and organize your life, disregarding the interruptions, and getting back on track as soon as possible. One of the keys to happiness is living a simple disciplined life."

For the next three years, Michael diligently followed his plan. In the beginning, he was often frustrated when the day did not go as planned. After some time, he began judging success, not by how effectively he followed his schedule, but rather how smoothly he returned to his plan after interruptions. The time quickly passed and Michael met with the master for the last time. Michael began, "I would like to thank you for truly changing my life. I am disciplined, focused and forever grateful."

Hiroshi said, "Michael, you have been a good student and have learned much in three years. I am interested in knowing which lesson most profoundly influenced you.

Michael did not hesitate, "One simple concept affected me over and over in my training. It was, 'Do not do what you want, and then you may do what you like.' In other words, do not become a prisoner of your own desires and habits. To remain free, seize and maintain control over thoughts and actions at all times. We must be mindful of the things we like, being careful not to become a slave to them. When we become attached, we suffer when we experience loss."

The master said, "Very good, Michael. As you return to your life outside these walls, remember that these truths are just as important in the outside world. Design your life, taking care to maintain your freedom. Do not become a prisoner of your own desires."

Do not judge success by how effectively you are able to execute Plan A, but rather how smoothly you are able to move into Plan B.

Man can be self-disciplined without becoming fanatical, he can be wise without waiting to be old; he can be influential without waiting for status.

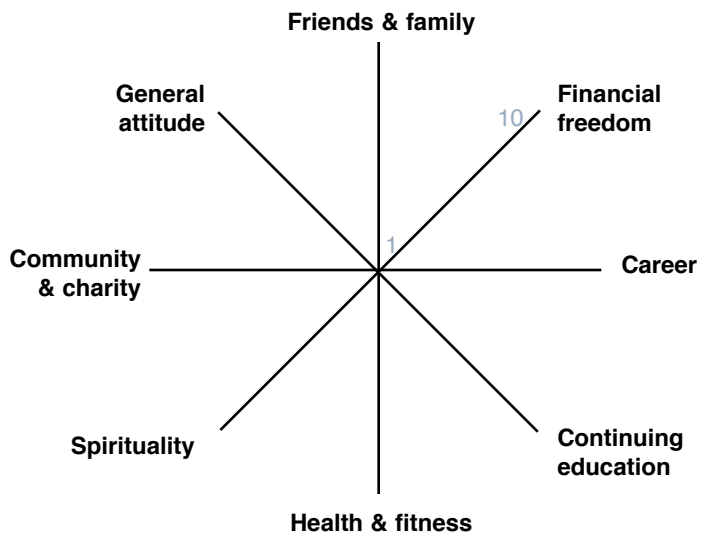
**Discipline is the bridge
between goals and
accomplishments.**

—E. James Rohn

**Activity
Mapping Your Needs**

The activity for this month is to map your needs by using this diagram. You will be rating eight categories, described on page 12, that affect everyone in life. Copy the diagram below on a separate piece of paper.

Circle of Balance

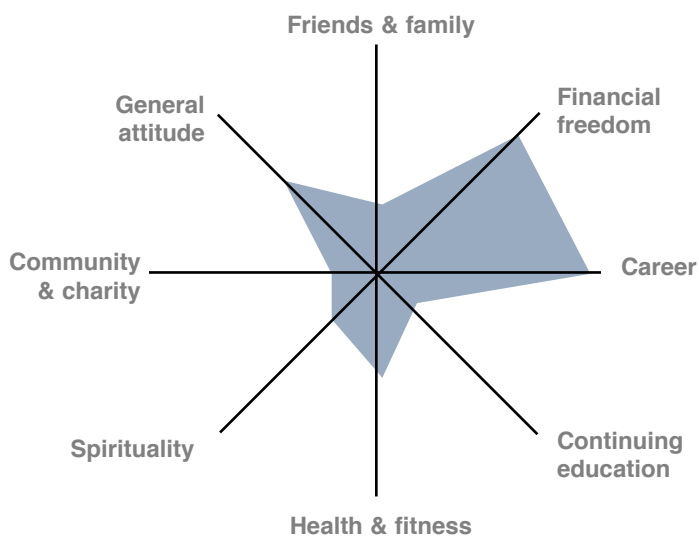


Now take a hard look at your life today, and honestly rate each category on a 1-10 scale. A rating of 10 indicates that a part of your life is the best it can be. A rating of 1 signals extreme problems. When you have marked all categories, begin at the top and connect the dots on each 'spoke' of the wheel. The final shape represents your Circle of Balance:

- Wide perfect circle.....***A strong and balanced life.*
- Jagged shape.....***Specific areas need attention.*
- Small narrow circle.....***You have balance, but all areas could be improved.*

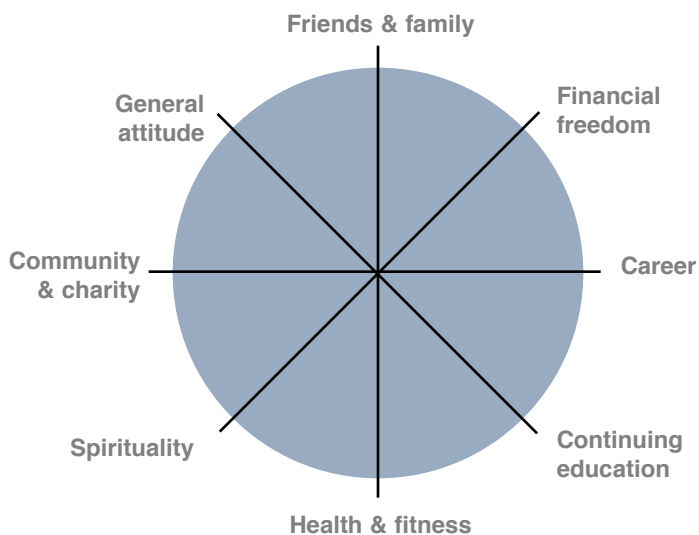
The goal is to have the widest perfect circle possible, thus showing balance and accomplishment in your life.

A jagged circle indicates need for improvement in specific areas:



To be balanced, one must remain in the center of the Tao.

A wide perfect circle indicates a strong and balanced life:



A disciplined man is one who keeps the promises that he makes to himself.

–Unknown

For every disciplined effort, there is a multiple reward.

–E. James Rohn

It is important to examine the following categories carefully, and then rate each as honestly as possible.

- 1. Friends and family**– In this category the goal is to measure the strength and depth of your relationships. Consider both the quality and quantity. Relationships with others help to give us joy in life.
- 2. Financial Freedom**– Do you have sound investments beyond your annual income from a job or business? Could you maintain your current quality of life if you retired or lost your job? Do you have the quality of life that you want? How close are you to financial freedom?
- 3. Career**– Are you happy with your chosen profession? If your work or more specifically how you spend your life, is merely a way to earn a paycheck, rate this section low. This is an important area to improve. If you enjoy your work, and it fulfills you, then rate your effectiveness on the job, your contributions, and your current level on the path to achieving all career goals. Keep in mind that you spend most of each day in this category.
- 4. Continuing Education**– Do you continue to learn and improve in your chosen field? How often do you attend workshops, conferences, and classes to keep current in your areas of interest? Many people equate education with formal institutions, and when they have completed high school or college, they stop learning. One of the keys to happiness is to remain a student, using all of the resources at your disposal to continue the learning process throughout life.

Self-discipline begins with the mastery of your thoughts. If you don't control what you think, you can't control what you do.

–Napoleon Hill

5. Health and Fitness– Measure the following factors of fitness. To score high in this category you must consider all five factors.

- A. Cardio-vascular conditioning:** Are you getting a good cardio workout several times a week?
- B. Resistance training:** Are you strengthening the muscular system several times a week?
- C. Flexibility:** Do you regularly stretch your whole body or do you mainly concentrate on a few muscle groups like hamstrings and quadriceps?
- D. Nutrition:** How disciplined is your diet? How often do you eat from the four most popular American food groups: Frozen, canned, fast and delivered? Instead, have you educated yourself instead on the importance of fresh wholesome foods?
- E. Meditation:** Do you sit regularly, taking control over your thoughts, feelings and emotions, helping you to deal with stress, tension and day to day problems and overall mental health?

6. Spirituality– When rating this category, think about your relationship with God, the Divine, the Universe, or other higher power recognized by your particular religion or belief system. This rating should not measure the frequency with which you perform rituals or traditions, but rather the depth of your personal and intimate relationship with a higher power on a day-to-day basis.

7. Community and Charity– How much time, money, energy and other resources do you give in your community? Take into consideration both the frequency and the amount.

8. General Attitude– Are you optimistic or pessimistic most of the time? Would people describe you as positive and upbeat, or rather grumpy or mopey?

IMPORTANT: Simply completing this exercise and realizing your needs for improvement are not enough. To begin real change in your life, you must take action in the areas which need attention.

Discipline is remembering what you want, and then acting accordingly.

Balance lies in the ability to be completely still.

Eat when you're hungry. Drink when you're thirsty. Sleep when you're tired.

—Buddhist proverb

Technique: Focus Point

Sit quietly in an upright position, and practice diaphragm breathing 6-12 times. After exhaling, begin concentrating on a specific spot located at eye level, about 3 or 4 feet in front of you. Hold your attention on the point, and let go of all other thoughts and feelings. During this technique, you can entertain any thoughts that are directly related to the point of focus. For example, the size of the spot, the shape and texture, color, etc. Use any thought that will cause you to concentrate deeper, but if the mind wanders to thoughts that are unrelated, gently bring it back. The only thing that matters is the point of concentration. Completely engross yourself in it. Continue this technique for ten to fifteen minutes.

Key Points

- Choose a point of concentration that is easy to see. It should be at least two inches in diameter. Concentrate deeply on the spot and don't let your mind wander.
- Try to practice this technique in a quiet area.
- When practicing this technique, hold your body completely still. Do not move.
- Practice this technique when you are fully alert and able to concentrate deeply. Do not attempt to practice when you are tired and sleepy.

Benefits

By practicing this technique often, you will:

- Improve your ability to keep the mind from wandering to any thought other than your point of focus.
- Gain the strengthened ability to concentrate on a task, job or project for longer periods of time.
- Gain greater creativity and productivity.

Recommended Reading

***Siddhartha**- Hermann Hesse

***Gifts from Eykis**- Wayne D. Dyer

Power vs. Force- David R. Hawkins, MD., Ph.D.

**Highly recommended*

**Endurance is one of the most difficult disciplines,
but it is to the one who endures that the final
victory comes.**

—Gautama Buddha

**Do not do what you
want, and then you
may do what you like.**

**Integrity is the
light that shines
from a disciplined
conscience.**

—James E. Faust

Notes