

# Why Martial Arts?

An Essay by Master Carlos Omar Garcia

The Martial Arts is a great way to improve your overall physical fitness, reduce stress and increase your self-confidence while learning an effective way to defend yourself. Unlike participation in other activities such as soccer or hockey, the Martial Arts is taught at an institute of learning called a *dojo* or *dojang*. Through the study of Martial Arts, the student develops every aspect of their life by training the mind, body and spirit.

THE MIND. Martial artist call upon their minds during their martial arts studies in a variety of ways. The practitioner will learn history, philosophy, striking/kicking techniques, forms, sparring strategy, self defense principles, *dojang* traditions and etiquette, and a multitude of other matters relevant to the art.

Martial Arts training, however, encompasses more than learning rules and techniques, it includes the observation and modification of the practitioner's thought and behavior patterns. Through the physical training, the student studies the way that they(as well as others) physically and mentally react to various circumstances.

The fact that Martial Arts training can be frustrating is another tool utilized in training the mind as learning to cope with this frustration is part of the training. Practitioners examine themselves in order to find the root of their dissatisfaction with their progress which leads to the primary mental goal of Martial Arts training which is the cultivation of self-awareness.

THE BODY. The benefits to the body are probably the easiest to recognize as there have been many articles and studies over the years identifying the many health benefits of the Martial Arts. Some of the physical benefits of the martial arts include:

- Improved reflexes and coordination,
- Increased strength and stamina,
- Increased flexibility and weight control,
- Improved cardiovascular health, and
- Stress reduction for a longer healthier life.

Martial Arts training is a way to develop and improve the overall fitness of the body. This is done through the repetition of basic movements which develops neuromuscular pathways that connect the muscle function with the nervous system. The various exercises are used to train the entire body and offers both aerobic and anaerobic benefits.

Many ask, “How old should you be to start?” ANSWER: “The age that you are right now.” Martial Arts training will improve strength, balance and flexibility at any age, however, the effect on people over 50 has the greatest margin of physical improvement. Dr. Peter Douris, of the New York Institute of Technology, found Martial Arts to be a safe and effective exercise for 40-60 year old individuals and, furthermore, referred to Martial Arts training as “self-defense against aging.”

THE SPIRIT. Through the Martial Arts, we learn a series of basic life skills that challenge us not only in Martial Arts training, but in our everyday lives. Unlike other approaches to health and fitness, the methods of the Martial Arts do not separate the body and the mind. Self-control and Integrity develop with the physical skills as both children and adults develop self-discipline and perseverance by regularly training and testing their skills.

Martial Arts students are taught to set goals and that hard work has its rewards. Through the Martial Arts, the practitioner becomes more confident and develops an attitude of self-reliance. This increase in confidence or Spirit, enables the student to better cope with stressful life-issues. The Martial Arts strives to develop the student’s “Spirit” by emphasizing character skills such as: COURTESY, INTEGRITY, SELF-CONTROL, PERSEVERANCE, and INDOMITABLE SPIRIT.

Gichin Funakoshi, considered by most to be the father of modern karate, put it best in these words, “The ultimate aim of karate lies not in victory or defeat, but in the perfection of character of its participants.”