



Episode 239 – Meditation & Martial Arts | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio episode 239. Today we're gonna talk about meditation and the relationship between meditation in the martial arts and history and a bunch of stuff like that. I want to thank you for tuning in. My name is Jeremy Lesniak, I'm your host for the show. I'm the founder of whistlekick sparring gear and apparel. You find everything we do @ whistlekick.com. You can find the show notes for this or any other episode at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. As you may know, these Thursday topic shows are often driven by listener suggestions, so if you have an idea if there's a subject that you want to know my thoughts on, go ahead and write to me jeremy@whistlekick.com and maybe I'll bounce some stuff back and forth with you via email. We'll come up with a framework, heck, maybe you can even help put the show together if that's something you're interested in. This company, the show, and the community around it, are always better when we have inputs, so I thank you in advance for everything that you will do in the future. And I thank you for everything you've done in the past that has helped us get to 239 episodes, it's crazy.

What's meditation? Meditation is such a vague term and it's a broadly used term. It's a term that can encompass everything from sitting quietly and just relaxing to a deep spiritual practice founded in decades of personal experience. It can be a lot of things in between. Of course, we're gonna focus on how it relates to martial arts today because this is a martial art show and to be honest, that's the context under which I best understand meditation. I've dabbled in meditation outside of martial arts, but really to me, meditation is part of my martial arts practice. If you research meditation, one of the things you can



Episode 239 – Meditation & Martial Arts | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

find is that it's old, it's really old and it's so hard to know where it comes from because it's that old. My guess and this is kinda founded in the research that I've done, it really seems like it's tied in with religion. That of course doesn't make martial arts a religious experience, although for some people it can be. Why is meditation so closely tied with martial arts? Especially if it has roots in religion and not martial art specifically. Well, martial arts whether or not it stems from monks you know, we have that that anecdotal story about Bodhiharma traveling from India to China and teaching the monks of the shaolin temple to develop their mind and you know that there's some conflicting history as to whether or not that happened and I don't know if that really matters, because either way, we've seen that there is been a strong adoption of the martial arts among monks, among people that are devout in their pursuit of personal development. Because what is martial arts if not personal development, we talk about that on the show on the show fairly frequently. The countries that we most often associate with having strong martial arts cultures, have strong ties to religions that value meditation. So, it's likely just the two-developed side-by-side and because they were developing in areas that people were doing both, they incorporated them. Of course, it's not hard to see the benefit that meditation can have with in the martial arts developing focus, unfocusing pain and the other benefits really do line up with the personal growth goals that most martial arts have. So, there you have it. Of course, not there you have it and that were done with this episode but that's kind of the crux, that's kinda where were gonna to stem from, the idea that martial arts and meditation have developed together over the years. And of course, we still see today martial arts like tai chi and Chi gong have meditation incorporated so deeply that it's hard to separate them from the practice. Japanese martial arts practitioners may be familiar with the concept of zazen and sitting in that practice in that meditative space before and/or after a class. There's a lot of science coming out around meditation there are a lot of indicators that there are some pretty profound benefits. Some of them start to get a little woo woo and since those are generally accepted scientifically yet, were not gonna talk about those. What we will talk about are six that I feel pretty strongly about, that I feel that the science, the evidence supports. Relaxation, the reduction of stress, improving concentration, increasing happiness, slowing aging and improving both cardiovascular and immune systems. There's a seventh and it's one that even though the science isn't fully formed, there's enough good stuff out there that I feel pretty strongly in mentioning. Meditation can actually change the brain, the physical brain. Recent science shows that physical changes happening key areas of the brain during meditation including the thickness of the hippocampus, which is responsible for both learning and memory. This make sense if you talk to anybody that meditates frequently, that has made it a life practice. One of the benefits that they'll offer, is that they think clear their mind to seems to work better without all kinds of caffeine or drugs or anything like that and that's something I can attest to. Meditation outside of the martial arts or something that has come in and out of my life over the years but I know for a fact that when I am meditating, things just seem to fire better in there. Of course, this is a martial art show so how do we think about meditation as it relates to martial arts? How do we gain those benefits? How can meditation benefit our martial arts? You can get more out of your training with the ability to ignore distractions. If you're able to focus on what you're doing with your training partners or what your instructor is asking you to do or what you're doing your own self martial arts practice. You're gonna develop more skill, more technique by ignoring what's going on around you. You're gonna be able to use your time better. Each repetition is going to be that much more effective leading you towards the goal. Remember it's not that practice makes perfect it's that practice makes permanent. So,



Episode 239 – Meditation & Martial Arts | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

the more you are focused on what you're doing, the more you're engraining those motor patterns into your body. You don't want to spend that time in granting poor motor patterns you want to make the best techniques possible. Most of us train some kind of environment where there are people watching and there's noise may be children or siblings, parents on the side of the training floor and sometimes they're distraction. One of the things I pride myself on when I'm training, is that a loud noise or something else that happens around me, I'll let it go. I'm able to focus on what I'm doing while the majority of the class will stop doing what they're doing and pay attention to it. We can all rule out that you know the baby crying on the side isn't a threat, so you don't need to pay attention when it should be paying attention what we're training. Meditation can help you with that. Meditation can help you develop faster reaction times by honing in on what's happening. Let's say you were sparring with someone and as you've meditated, you become better at focusing on what's happening with that. We have a finite amount of brainpower of a certain amount we can pay attention to at any given time. When you're sparring in a class there are probably other people sparring they're again, making noise, children crying on the side, and the more distracted you are, the less you're going to be able to respond to what they're doing, the less you're going to be able to see, to anticipate, to act effectively. But the more you meditate, the more you're able to focus, the better you get at acting in a way that almost defies reaction. Many of us that have been training while have had moments where something seems to come at us that we avoided or blocked and reflecting on it you think; how did I do that? I had a moment like that, just a couple weeks ago. I was sparring with someone, it's the first time I ever sparred with them, they had a little bit of an ego and that was coupled with the lack of flexibility that they compensated for by putting more effort into their kicks. They were trying to kick up to the head at you know kind of the outer edges of their skill, their flexibility and if I had not moved my face back about the 3 inches that I did, I would have a broken jaw. This was a really hard hook kick and it barely avoided my nose. It was absolutely not a conscious thing, it was a reaction and I know that it was because of my ability to focus on what was happening and just kind of allow my body to react in the way that it was, it wanted. It saved me some injury.

One of my favorite benefits to meditation under the context of martial arts is that something everyone can do together. It's something that regardless of your time training your height, your strength, injury, everybody can do it and everyone can do it together. Doesn't take up much space and it doesn't have to take a lot of time. Meditation can happen when physical training can happen, again injury or overexertion or you know, just being really tired you can meditate on a plane, you can meditate in a car, assuming you're not driving. I'm about to take a flight in a couple days and I plan to meditate. And the final and make my favorite benefit of meditation as it relates to martial arts is it can increase self-awareness. When we think about martial arts as a program, we'll call it two develop. Yourself personally, being aware of who you are is a huge part of that and by having more self-awareness, you can train more effectively you can become not only a better person but a better martial artist and the benefits have been pretty darn quickly. When should you meditate? The question is when shouldn't you meditate? And really there's no good answer to that. You can meditate before training, after training, and a break in between training. It's personal preference, there's really no bad time. In fact, there's science showing that breaks utilizing meditation have been incredibly effective for children. Well, I would argue it's can be effective for everyone. How can you start working meditation into what you do?



Episode 239 – Meditation & Martial Arts | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

It's pretty simple you just have to pick a time, develop a routine. People are creatures of habit it takes about three weeks or so, I know there's some conflicting evidence whether or not that's the right amount of time but let's say, give 3 to 4 weeks to meditation, even his fist just a couple minutes a day, you're going to see the benefits, it's going to get easier over time. I like doing it when you first wake up because you've set the tone for the day. You can do it just before bed it'll help you relax and get better sleep or you can just do it again during a break at lunch, sit in the car, something. Meditation has been shown to increase productivity, so taking out 10 minutes of work for 10 minutes of meditation, you're going to get that back multifold. Like I said you don't have to do it for long, just a few minutes to start with. My sweet spot is about 10 minutes, I get the benefit of meditation, it's a time that I find I can easily work into my day and it's not so long that when I go into it I feel stressed. Of course, there are apps, headspace, brain.FM and dozens if not hundreds of others that can help facilitate your meditation and if you've struggled with meditation in the past I'd urge you to check out one of these. They can be really helpful in guiding you through and I can personally attest that headspace, when I started with headspace, I was actually paying for quite a long time, took me from struggling with five minutes of meditation to doing 15-20 minutes and not even realizing that the time had gone by. It was wonderful. Of course, I'm not gonna get any kind of kickback for recommending them, so you can check them out or anybody else.

Of course, I think that the real goal of this episode for the instructors out there I'd like to encourage you to find a way to work meditation into your class. There are number ways you can do that I grew up with a school that offered a few minutes of meditation, zazen, before and after class, karate class. I loved it, even at a young age I loved it, because I was a kind of a crazy kid my brain was all over the place and while I wasn't able to articulate why I enjoyed it. The idea of a 4-5-6-year-old who basically couldn't be controlled, sitting quietly, I'm sure it didn't happen every time but it's the one time at class that I don't look back and have memories of being disciplined often, because I was able to focus. Maybe I lost that focus quickly but I know I feel very strongly that it was beneficial. I do it now still, I meditate on my own before most of my training. It gives me a chance to clear my head and go on to my training with the best attitude possible. I think a few minutes of meditation or quiet time relaxation whatever you want to call it at the beginning and end of a martial arts class, it's a wonderful idea. For some people, it will be it will be the only quiet time they get all day. I think that something we can all agree is a good thing.

Do you meditate is meditation part of your martial practice? If it is, I'd love to hear from you. You can write to me at jeremy@whistlekick.com or you can reach out to us, we are @whistlekick on social media. Feel free to leave a comment in the show notes at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com and while you're over there and join the newsletter list. We've just sent out a great coupon it's going to have expired by the time you listen to this but, that's okay because there'll be another one coming at some point. We don't do them often and they are not huge discounts, but we do love to reward our loyal listeners. I wanna thank you for tuning and spending some time with my voice today, wherever you are I hope you're having a wonderful day. Until next time, train, hard smile and have a great day.