



Episode 45 – The Spiritual Side of Martial Arts | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com

Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey everybody what's going on its episode 45 of whistlekick martial arts radio, and today we're going to talk about the spiritual elements of the martial arts. I'm your host Jeremy Lesniak and I'm also whistlekick's founder. Here at whistlekick we make the world's best sparring gear and some great apparel and accessories for traditional martial artists. Thanks to everyone tuning in again and thank you to any of the new folks checking us out. Don't forget you can find all of our past podcast episodes, show notes for this one and a lot more at whistlekickmartialartsradio.com and while you're on our website go ahead and sign up for our newsletter, we offer exclusive content and discounts to subscribers it's also the only place to find out about upcoming guests on the show. We make a lot of great things here at whistlekick like our line of sweat shirts. We've got pull overs and zip ups, different colors different styles and you can check out all of those over at whistlekick.com. But today we're talking about the spiritual aspects of martial arts not sweat shirts. Now let me be really clear here when I say spiritual I'm not talking about religion. Okay we're just gonna talk about the spiritual part and for some that might be a little blurry of a concept right now but hopefully as we go through the episode you'll understand more of what I mean. Martial arts isn't just a physical pursuit as just about anyone knows. Martial arts is a method of personal development and this concept goes all the way back to what is the generally accepted origin of what we today call traditional martial arts. It was the Indian monk Bodhidharma who developed the martial arts as a way of keeping the monks of the Shaolin temple in physical shape. He found that the monks focus on meditation left them mentally strong but physically pretty weak so he gave them a set of exercises to strengthen their bodies and these exercises are what ultimately developed into martial arts. Now the combat aspects we're secondary even back then just as they are for many of us now. It was the Japanese swordsman, Miyamoto Musashi the author of the book of Five Rings, that's how most of us know him today, who said that the more he looked for proficiency and efficiency in his martial arts training the more he looked for proficiency and efficiency and all things in his life. He began to look for the deeper purpose in everything that he did. There's a story of a master of the Japanese tea ceremony from the province of Tasa a man without any martial arts skill but with great meditative and spiritual strength. He accidentally gave offense to a samurai and was challenged to a duel. He went to the local Zen master for advice. The Zen master told him that he had little chance of surviving the duel but then he could ensure an honorable death by training in the combat as he would do formal ritual of the tea ceremony. He should compose his mind paying no attention to the petty chattering of thoughts of life and death and what others were saying he should grasp the sword as he would the ladle in the tea ceremony and with the same precision and concentration of his mind that he would use for the boiling water on the tea leaves he should step forward and have no thought of the consequences and strike his opponent down in a single attack. So the tea master prepared himself and he abandoned all of his thoughts and his fears about death and when the morning of the duel came, the samurai who saw how poised and fearless the tea master was so shaken that he begged forgiveness and called off the duel. Now there's something to be said for using a combat oriented practice to better yourself like the martial arts. Now personally I think any practice, any sport or art or hobby can yield some wonderful benefits but for those practices that require a perspective on violence and ultimately mortality there's a whole other level the word "do" that follows so many martial arts, Taekwondo, Karate do, Aikido, translates into English as the word way not why as in part of dairy but to follow a



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way or a path and while some martial arts schools do really explore the spiritual side of martial arts practice most of them don't dedicate any significant time to it. I wonder what Bodhidharma would think if he saw the way he handled his creation today. Now anyone that spends real time in the martial arts has experienced pain, whether that's from an injury or an accidental strike from a training partner now whatever the cause, there's a lesson in that pain, we've learned to understand it and what it means for our martial arts. I've known a number of martial arts instructors that see accidental contact not only the fault of the striker but the receiver, you should learn to block better, was a combat I heard quite often as a child, now certainly there was an element of humor there and I'm not saying that my martial arts instructors were cold hearted but there's some truth in there because as we develop the body we're developing the mind. The ability to avoid and endure pain is development of the self and it's something that we experience as we progress through martial arts for some martial arts becomes a form of moving meditation. I can say that when I'm in a really good groove with a martial arts form that I know well and I enjoy it, I enter this sort of meditative state where I can see myself engaging in that hypothetical combat that after all I'm supposed to be acting out. Spend enough time doing these physical and these mental practices and they really can take on a spiritual side. It maybe is your for some of you to consider characters that we all know well, let's say Yoda and Mr. Miyagi they are 2 characters from famous martial arts movies and most people that have seen those movies would agree that there's a spiritual side to their characters and to the way that they teach their students and you can see in the way that they teach Luke and Daniel that there's a spiritual component to how they're instructing. I think the best example that comes to mind easily is the Wax on and Wax off in Karate Kid. Now certainly there was martial arts application to what Mr. Miyagi was teaching Daniel but he was hiding it in a meditative practice. You can't sit there and wax a car by hand repeatedly in a single direction without starting to zone out and rather than that being an expression of discipline I feel that the character of Mr. Miyagi was encouraging that getting Daniel to continue the action the ultimately the martial action while his brain tuned out to meditate as he was engaged in martial practice whether he realized it or not. Now I'm not going to say that the spiritual aspect, the spiritual training is a requirement of martial arts, one of my favorite sayings about martial arts and you've probably heard it on the show before is that you get back exactly and only what you put in. If you don't have any desire for spiritual growth you're not going to approach martial arts in that way and not gonna get spiritual benefits out of it most likely. I think you probably can make a case for spiritual growth that comes without awareness but that feels like a really deep philosophical topic that isn't appropriate for this podcast after watching myself my degrees philosophy so try not to go off the rails too often. Now I'm putting together this episode, I found myself struggling a little bit more than normal, see for me the spiritual side of martial arts is really obvious but I found I actually find it really difficult to explain. But the notion of you'll know it when you see it works only so far and doesn't make for a very good episode and would be pretty short right but if you haven't been training long enough to experience what I'm talking about that you'll know it when you see it is meaningless. So I found myself referring to a lot of what others had written and there's actually a lot of great literature out there even just freely available on the internet on this subject and if it interests you I'd really encourage you to poke around give it a Google and see what you come up with. You'll probably see some reference points that I used for this episode and for me it all comes back to the idea that spirituality is incredibly personal, for some people the notion of religion and spirituality have a lot of overlap while for others they're actually mutually exclusive and I think that's why it parallels so well with



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martial arts overall just as there are different kinds of people and different martial arts there are different ways to approach the spiritual aspect of your life within the martial arts including not having a component and as long as you're getting what you want out of the martial arts, there's no wrong answer here. So I hope you got something out of this, if I have a goal with this episode it's actually a little different from others it's just to get you to think, I'd like you to consider your martial arts training and how it fits into your life, what is your personal do your path are you growing as a person and is the martial arts a method to help you do that, these may not all be easy questions but I'd say that the most important part about the questions is simply asking them. So there you go. So head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com for the show notes and then sign up for the newsletter. Remember this is episode 45 so go ahead check everything out leave us a comment about what you thought as you heard this is a kind of a departure from what we normally talk about on the show and I wanna know what you think. So let us know whether you leave us a comment on the website or at one of our social media accounts or at whistlekick just about everywhere doesn't matter we just wanna hear it from you and please if you haven't already go ahead leave us a review on iTunes or wherever you're downloading the podcast, those reviews really do help us a lot and we wanna hear it from you, we wanna know what you think and if you leave us a review and we read it on the air, we're gonna send you some free stuff 10:56 and don't forget we've got our free apps they're on the Google play store or in the Appstore just search whistlekick you're gonna find them and those are great ways to stay up on the show if you don't like to use a separate podcast out. So until next time train hard smile and have a great day.