



The Isshinryu Way Everything Karate & Kobudo

**Isshinryu
Worldwide**

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Learning and Sharing

Growing in the Martial Arts has long been achieved through the support of others. When you read the biographies of great Martial Artists, they always start with their instructors. Just as in the past, without our instructors, we would not know what we know or be who we are.

This isn't just something that should happen for beginners, but for everyone. No matter how long you've been training, there's always more you can learn, if you are willing and able. The willingness often becomes the hard part for many people. But, the reality is that if you want to be the best you can, being open to learning, understanding and deciding is the most important step.

If you are reading this, there's a good chance you already understand how important it is to keep learning and improving. Great Job. Here's where I can tell you how to put it into action. By sharing your knowledge, you will come to under-

stand it better. Help out in the Dojo, explain things to others, help everyone get better.

Learning is the other great way, and exposing yourself to new ideas and ways to think of things you've know for a long time will jump your understanding ahead. Take the opportunities when they happen.

This opportunity happens through seminars, visiting other dojos and many avenues, seek them out and participate.

Speaking of opportunities, The Isshinryu Expo is happening soon, there's no better opportunity to learn about a wide variety of topics from instructors across North America and Europe. If you aren't booked to attend, do that now.

Learn, Practice, Share.

Upcoming Events

Events

May 19-22 2023—
Isshinryu Expo—
Thunder Bay, ON, Canada

July 14 & 15 2023—
Isshinryu Hall of Fame—
Gatlinburg, TN, USA

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Essential Isshinryu is available!

For more information on the first Canadian Isshinryu book, visit www.essentialisshinryu.com!

Growth never has to stop



The Many Benefits of Training in the Martial Arts

By Megan Rubin

As a karateka of over 17 years and a university student studying kinesiology, the science of human movement, I have personally experienced many benefits from practicing martial arts. I believe that people of all genders, ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds can benefit from participating in martial arts training, even as little as once a week, although the more you practice, the more benefits you will reap. These benefits include not only the obvious physical improvements, but also the physiological, mental, and personal improvements that can be felt before, after, and during training.

Perhaps the most obvious benefits that are both seen and felt in those who practice martial arts are physical. For example, a person may observe that they have lost weight or gained muscle tone in their arms, legs and abdomen from participating. This is likely due to the nature of the martial arts that involves conditioning of the body to both hit hard and to receive a hit, as well as its many cardiovascular components that increase a person's stamina and overall athleticism. It is believed that a person who practices karate must be well-rounded and this includes being physically fit. This is why all belt testing's in Isshin-Ryu involve a physical component made up of push-ups to test upper body strength and endurance, sit-ups to test abdominal strength and endurance, and a run to test one's cardiovascular fitness. A karateka may also notice improvements in other physical aspects such as agility and flexibility. Some ways that agility is improved in the martial arts is through the practicing of kata, and kumite, both of which involve coordinated combinations of whole-body movements strung together in long sequences. Flexibility is also improved through stretching of the muscles and is especially important to maintain as we age because it helps us live independently for longer and can decrease chronic pain in areas like the lower back and legs. Stretching before and after participating in the martial arts through proper warm-ups and cool-downs, which are commonly included as part of the class, can increase

one's flexibility and therefore allow them to feel the benefits that this comes with.

Other physical components that can be improved through martial arts training include posture, reflexes, mobility and balance. Posture is emphasized from the very start of any class, where a formal bow is completed. Before bowing, the sensei ensures that the students have correct posture by saying "keotsuke", meaning "attention". This emphasis on posture not only signifies respect between teacher and student but can also be applied outside of the dojo in our day-to-day lives, which gives us many benefits such as reduced back pain and less tension throughout the body. Reflexes are also improved through martial arts training during activities like focus pad drills and kumite with a partner. Fast reaction times and reflexes are essential for karateka because, as two of the eight codes of Isshin-Ryu karate state, "the body should be able to change direction at any time," and "the time to strike is when opportunity presents itself". With fast reaction times and reflexes, one can both block and strike quickly, meaning that they can reduce the time that they spend in threatening situations. Improving reaction time through training can translate to benefits in everyday life where it is essential for tasks like driving or participating in other sports. Mobility and balance are also essential physical components of karate. Being agile and having the ability to move quickly allows one to escape dangerous situations and defend themselves effectively when needed. Balance also allows one to effectively execute techniques like blocks, punches and kicks with power as well as provides benefits such as increased joint mobility and decreased risk of falls, especially as we age. Overall, the physical benefits felt and seen from practicing martial arts are numerous and can be applied to our everyday lives outside of our training.

Participating in martial arts training also has many physiological benefits that relate to the way our bodies function. Some ways that it benefits us are by decreasing blood pressure and resting heart rate. Blood pressure, the force that is exerted on the arteries by the circulating blood, is often used as an indicator of cardiovascular fitness. Due to the physical nature of kara-

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te, cardiovascular fitness is improved through activities like kata and kumite. Resting heart rate also is an indicator of cardiovascular fitness, with the lower the heart rate generally meaning the healthier the heart. Again, this is improved through the physical components of karate that involve quick, long duration movements such as kata. Other physiological benefits include increasing VO₂max and improving aerobic power, which are both improved similarly to the above. Overall, the physiological benefits that come from participating in the martial arts are numerous and although may not be visible, can provide us with benefits that improve our quality of life.

Many benefits to a person's mental health are also present in those who practice karate or other martial arts regularly. Some of the ways that it improves one's mental health is through increases in concentration (or focus), self-confidence, and overall positivity. Focus is improved specifically through martial arts training during kata, basics, and other drills such as striking a focus pad. For both kata and basics, the karateka must focus all of their attention on the techniques and the movements in order to execute them not only in the correct order but also with the appropriate power, speed and coordination. During focus pad training, focus is essential for the karateka to have in order to accurately hit the target with speed and precision. This can also be applied to kumite where focus is required to strike the opponent when the opportunity presents itself as well as to block them and avoid getting hit. Without focus, a karateka is vulnerable to being hit and less likely to strike effectively.

Self-confidence is also improved through martial arts training. Karate training often involves pushing students to do things that they may not be comfortable with at first, such as performing a kata in front of their peers or fighting an opponent who may be larger than them. However, as they began to accomplish such feats, they begin to gain confidence in themselves not only as karateka but also as people. I have witnessed this first-hand, with many of my students coming to their first class very timid and

quiet. However, as their training progressed, they began to feel not only more comfortable but also more confident in themselves and their skills. This is then applied to their everyday lives, where they feel more confident to stand up for themselves and are confident in their ability to defend themselves if needed.

A person's overall positivity is a third aspect of mental health that can be improved through martial arts training. This can be achieved by focusing on one's personal strengths, which are often emphasized by peers and sensei in the dojo. As well, positivity is fostered through celebrating successes such as congratulating someone after a belt testing and promotion. Teamwork and resilience are two other ways that positivity is promoted which occur in the dojo during activities like sparring with one another and also outside of the dojo such as when competing in team kata in a tournament. The overall welcoming and encouraging atmosphere of a dojo is felt by every member of the dojo, making the karateka feel like part of a family and therefore increasing the positivity that one feels. Overall, the benefits to one's mental health that practicing karate provides are abundant and often serve as the most motivating factor for students to keep returning to the dojo to practice.

Along with the physical, physiological and mental benefits, there are also many personal benefits. Some examples of these types of benefits are helping one to build responsibility, goal-setting abilities, discipline, respect, and leadership skills. The martial arts teach us that we are responsible for our actions. By having the knowledge required to defend ourselves and the ones we love when faced with conflict, we must hold ourselves accountable for our reactions to this conflict. As taught to me by listening to the story of the creation of the Isshin-Ryu Megami, karate teaches us that we know how to fight, but we will only do so if we have to. Goal-setting is also taught through the martial arts through belt promotions among other things. I have always been told that earning a black belt is just the

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beginning and I can definitely attest to that. All ranks of students have an overarching goal to reach for, whether that be improving their kata, learning new bunkai to expand their knowledge, or earning their next belt. Karate teaches us how to set those goals and how to reach them, which can be applied to almost every aspect of life outside the dojo. Karate also teaches us discipline, which can be applied not only inside the dojo but also in our daily lives. Learning how to listen to your sensei and fellow students, sitting at attention, bowing to one another and practicing basics and kata for what may seem like endless amounts of time, are all examples of how we, as karateka, become disciplined. Having discipline is beneficial to our lives because it keeps us focused and motivated on our goals and the tasks ahead of us. I believe that it makes us more likely to succeed in anything we set our minds to, whether that be getting a promotion at work or fighting a two-on-one match against the two biggest fighters in the dojo.

Respect is another aspect of personal wellness that is taught in the martial arts. Having respect for those around you and for yourself are expected from each and every karateka. One way in particular that respect is displayed in the dojo is through the bow, or "rei". At the beginning and end of every class, we bow to our grandmaster and to our sensei. We also bow to our partners before sparring or do-

ing drills or when entering or exiting the dojo as a sign of respect for our peers and place of training. Karate teaches us that respect comes in all forms and in order to receive respect from others, we must show respect to them. A final aspect of personal health that I will touch on is leadership skills. Karate fosters the personal growth of leaders and even allows lower-ranked students to practice teaching their peers. Whether that be through leading the warm-up, basics, kata, or teaching others a bunkai, the skills needed to be a leader are present. The nature of karate itself (looking presentable, having respect for others, goal-setting and effective communication), lends to being a good leader, which allows us to share our ideas about our martial art as well as our ideas outside of the dojo, with the world. Overall, the benefits to our personal lives that karate gives us are plentiful and I can honestly say that I am proud of the person that karate has helped shape me to be.

In conclusion, the martial arts provide us with numerous benefits whether they are physical, physiological, mental, or personal. Although everyone may experience these benefits differently, they all have positive effects on not only who we are as karateka, but also as who we are outside of the dojo.

Help Wanted!

By Richard Ruberto

As most already know, I will be one of many presenters at this year's Health and Wellness Expo.

I am currently committed to three time slots on Saturday and Sunday as indicated on the posted schedule. If anyone has questions or needs help understanding anything martial arts related please do not hesitate to ask me, I am availing myself privately to all attendees at no cost. We can easily find a place where we can train together in private. One on one or a few of you at a one time is perfect.

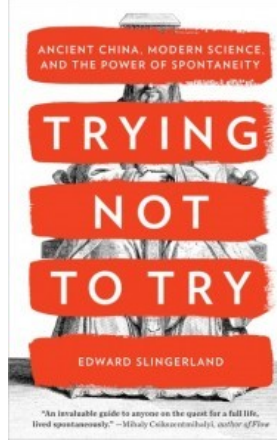
I look forward to giving my all to this effort. This is who I am and what I enjoy doing. I look forward to seeing you all.



Trying not to Try Book Review

Review by John Meilleur

TRYING NOT TO TRY
Ancient China,
Modern Science,
and the Power of Spontaneity
Edward Slingerland



This document is a combination of a review of the book “Trying Not to Try” written by Edward Slingerland, as well as additional discussions of how some of the theories presented in the book, may apply to such things as martial arts, or playing jazz piano.

In this book Edward Slingerland does a great job at linking western scientific knowledge of the mind to the older eastern philosophies dating back to over 2,000 years ago.

While I remain very interested in the blending and associating of the eastern and western philosophical approaches to understanding the mind, in this book review I maintained a questioning mind how these philosophies may have practical applications to the practice of any artist, including martial art practitioners and musicians.

Book Overview

Throughout the book there was a dominant theme of “wu-wei” and how it was a dominant focus of the older eastern philosophies. Wu-wei is a state of being and when someone is in that state the resulting energy is something they referred to as “de”.

What made this book interesting were the discussions combining the wu-wei and de philosophies with the knowledge of western science and how the human brain operates. It is the blending of those two different aspects and viewpoints that combined to provide additional clarity on how we operate and how we may leverage that information into our daily lives.

In this review there are various aspects to the human mind that are presented around how the human mind processes thought and physical movements using the conscious and unconscious mind. In a martial art scenario, the more that physical movement is directed from the unconscious mind the better.

In summary there are a handful of aspects to learning and practicing any new activity, be it a martial art or learning to play a musical instrument. Those activities are learning, practicing, then implementing the new activities. Each of these 3 types of tasks, utilize different parts of the brain in order to create and then use, what is commonly referred to as muscle memory.

While my personal focus in this review were around practical applications to karate, the theories and information presented below are applicable to any art form, including learning and playing a musical instrument or painting.

Historical Overview

Trying Not to Try provides an overview of some of the core teachings of several ancient philosophers and thinkers.

Included in the book are a number of references we may have heard prior to this. References such as Confucius, Mencius, Zen Buddhism, Daoism and Laozi are touched upon.

It also includes references to books such as the Zhuangzi, the Laozi and the Analects.

Much of the discussion in Trying not to Try around historical figures and writings, was around the teachings from these various historical figures or groups, and how they approached the desire to be in the state of wu-wei. It became apparent while reading the book the quest for a state of authentic flow in our lives, has been ongoing for over 2,000 years. For over 2,000 years, humans have been on the elusive search for states of being that tapped into the parts of our psyche that allowed us to live in the states of ease and flow. That quest did not begin recently and with each group of teachers and thinkers in the past, they each attempted to add their version of the recipe on how to achieve these states.

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Trying not to Try Book Review

Review by John Meilleur

Hot and Cold Cognition

The concepts of hot and cold cognition are frequently touched upon in the book *Trying not to Try*.

Cold cognition refers to conscious thought and is slow in terms of speed and ease. Cold cognition is activated whenever a person is learning a new concept that had not been done before. When learning something new, we must consciously think about each individual step that must be done. Very little movement at this point is automatic since no prior history or memory exists within our system on how to perform that new task, including a new kata.

The first time we learn a kata, we have no prior history of the movements of the kata. We struggle to make our way through the kata, being very conscious of each movement, and slowly and clumsily perform the moves. There is little flow or ease at this point since each movement is new to us. Automatic movements do not happen at this point, and do not have a life of their own.

Hot cognition, however, are movements drawn from the unconscious reservoir of movement and patterns that have previously been learned and practiced many times. The hot, unconscious movements are performed much faster than cold cognition movements and done with minimal conscious thought associated with them. There is an ease and effortless flow to the movements where they begin to take on a life of their own as the kata is performed.

An example of hot cognition is a sensei who has practiced a particular kata many times over a number of years. At this point, the movements of the kata are well known to the unconscious. The movements of the kata appear to happen on their own. The movements are concise and defined, while at the same time the kata has a life of its own and appears to flow much more easily than when the kata was first learned.

In summary, cold cognition is slower conscious thought, and hot cognition is faster unconscious

thought. It is never either hot or cold cognition in motion. It is always a combination of both, but there is definitely a focus in either hot or cold.

Wu-Wei and de

A dominant theme in the book was around 2 terms referenced as “wu-wei” and “de”.

Wu-wei, pronounced “ooo-way”, translates to “no trying” or “no doing”. It is the state a person is in when movements are effortless and in a unselfconscious state of mind. It is the state the artist is in when creating a masterpiece of art and loses track of time and the space around them. In that state the only thing that exists for them, is the creative flow of the present moment where they effortlessly create paintings, play the piano, or performs martial arts.

The state of wu-wei is also in alignment with a term “mushin” which translates to “no mind”. Mushin is a short form of “mushin no shin”, which means “the mind without mind”. It is the state of flow and being in the moment. Where people flow through time always being in the present moment.

There is a chapter in “Zen in the Martial Arts” called Let Your Mind Flow that talks more about Mushin. For now it is sufficient to recognize the concepts of mushin are aligned with the concepts of wu-wei, and they are both about entering into the state of flow from the unconscious. For Star Wars fans, when Luke was told “use the Force Luke”, he was being asked to let go trying hard with the conscious mind, and letting go meant entering the state of mushin, or wu-wei.

“de” on the other hand, describes the energy of one who is in the state of wu-wei. It is the energy that other people will sense in a person in wu-wei, and are drawn to. A person in wu-wei will naturally and effortlessly draw people to him or her because others are attracted to the “de” energy. A person in their natural flow and lives in the moment, will have that certain energy that is difficult to describe, but naturally attracts others to them.

Stroop Task

The Stroop task is a test that will demonstrate the speed at which the mind can process straightforward questions or complex questions. It is an example of a cognitive control, or executive control tasks that re-

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Trying not to Try Book Review

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quires the cold, conscious mind to step in to resolve the task.

To do the test simply read each of the 6 words below silently, then say “upper” or “lower” depending on case of the word.

For example for “UPPER”, read “Upper” silently in your mind, then say “Upper” out loud verbally to reflect the uppercase letters. Do this for each of the words in the list below and make note of any shift in reaction times.

1. UPPER
2. lower
3. lower
4. UPPER
5. upper
6. LOWER

As you may have noticed when the word and the upper or lower case of the word match, the mind is much faster performing the task.

However, when the word and the actual case of the letters is different, the mind must go into additional thinking and analysis, which takes more time and effort.

For example, when reading the word “UPPER”, both the word and uppercase letters align, resulting in a faster response since it is processed by a particular part of the brain. This is an example of hot cognition.

However when reading the word “upper”, the word itself and the case of the letter conflict, resulting in additional thinking necessary to address the case differences in the response, and analysis to read the word “upper” silently, but then say “lower” out loud. This is an example of cold cognition.

This task, provides examples of faster or slower reaction times, depending on what aspect of the brain is involved in resolving the question. Ideally all movement is concise and fast, with very little conscious thought. Moves and patterns engrained by many repetitions over time, create those desired faster response times for the primary reason the patterns have been engrained

into specific areas of the brain. A term commonly used for this is “muscle memory” however the memory of the activity is actually patterns engrained into the basal ganglia part of the brain which is thought to plays key roles in motor control.

In martial arts, if the patterns have not been engrained into the basal ganglia, the response times will be slower and not as concise since other parts of the brain must be engaged to consciously evaluate options and responses. This is not desirable from a martial arts perspective however it is where we all start when learning something new.

Repeating kata many times, eventually programs the motor control area of the brain (basal ganglia) with those patterns. Once programmed, the physical responses and implementations of those kata will be faster, more unconscious and concise without the slower processing of cold cognition to implement those faster movements. Once learned and practiced, the kata and movements can be experienced as happening automatically, with little conscious input into making them happen.

Key Areas of the Brain

With the advancements of modern science, we are beginning to gain additional clarity of the different parts of the brain. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), we now have additional insights, into which areas of the brain become more active when doing specific types of activities. While scientific analysis continues, the resulting scientific information suggests the following areas of the brain listed below, may have the following functions.

Anterior Cingulate Cortex

The Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC), is sometimes considered the smoke detector of the mind. It is constantly sensing the world around us and deciding what to do next. The primary function of the ACC may be a triage of sorts where depending on what is being perceived, it will alert other parts of the mind on action that is needed. The ACC helps decide which tasks are sent to the conscious, unconscious or a balance of both, for processing and response.

Lateral Prefrontal Cortex

If the ACC is a smoke detector of sorts, the lateral



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prefrontal Cortex (PFC), could be the fire response team. The lateral PFC integrates conscious and unconscious memory and thoughts. When the task at hand requires additional processing, such as in the stroop task with “upper” the ACC lets the lateral PFC know about the conflict about uppercase and lowercase, and hands off the resolution of the problem, to the lateral PFC.

Medial Prefrontal Cortex

The medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC), is the area of the brain that is very active, when a jazz musician is playing the piano without any thought. It is as if the music is playing through the musician and the music is just happening. It is in this state the musician is able to become the watcher, and the music appears to be just happening without any effort.

It is this area of the brain that draws dominantly from the unconscious programming, or muscle memory, from repeated past experiences attained in such activities such as the martial arts or a jazz musician.

Basal Ganglia (muscle memory)

The basal ganglia appears to be one area of the brain that focusses on motor control and automated motor routines.

For example as kata is repeated many times, the basal ganglia becomes more and more aware of the patterns and physical movements associated with the kata. So much so, there begins to be times when the kata just seems to happen on its own and we are almost able to watch the kata unfold automatically.

For the jazz musician, after years of playing the piano, what is commonly referred to as muscle memory, gets programmed into the basal ganglia as musical riffs that can be called upon with very little conscious thought.

Meditation

There are many benefits to the practice of meditation, including relaxation and clearing the mind. While the practice of meditation exists in many forms in many cultures and groups, the

picture of a Zen monk comes to mind when I think of meditation. Sitting still and in the state of effortless watching of thoughts. Of times where the meditator is able to enter states of openness and expansiveness that can only be reached by letting go of conscious thoughts.

From an analysis point of view, meditation allows the conscious mind to relax and let go of the attachment to the myriad of thoughts that seem to continuously be spinning in the mind. When the meditator is able to let go of conscious thoughts, it in a way, trains the mind to let go of trying to control all thoughts, and it opens the door to the unconscious.

In practical terms around the subject of this book, the practice of meditation helps train the mind to be more comfortable of entering into the space of wu-wei and allowing that state of wu-wei to come into our way of being in the world.

Meditation, in alignment with the concepts of wu-wei and mushin, allow the martial artist to allow the flow of movements to come from muscle memory where they are fast and defined. Where the martial artist does not have to consciously think about the movements and the movements just seem to happen on their own as they flow from the unconscious.

The concepts of Trying not to Try can also be applied to a meditation process. The way to deep stillness does not come from trying hard. It is indeed as the title states, of Trying not to Try. The path to touch on the inner stillness, comes from letting go of trying, while still focussed on letting go to experience and touch the stillness. We do not touch the stillness by consciously thinking about getting there. And that is the dance. How to let go of trying, while still guiding ourselves to a specific state.

Wrap Up

In summary, Trying not to Try is recommended as a great read for anyone interested in how some of the ancient eastern philosophies can now be explained in alignment with recent scientific discoveries of the west and the workings of the mind.

Seminar at Bryan College 2023

By Tim Boykin

Greetings from beautiful southeast Tennessee!

A multi-focus training seminar was conducted on the campus of Bryan College on 15 April. Bryan College is located in Dayton Tennessee and is unique in that it offers a full time athletic scholarship program in support of Isshinryu Karate!

The seminar drew black belt participants from Michigan, Virginia, Alabama, and South Carolina and was conducted in tandem with on-site instructors in the campus athletic field house.

The morning used a “mock” tournament format to simultaneously score kata, provide feedback to students as they depart the ring and share process improvement with them.

The afternoon concentrated on kumite and used the same mock tournament scenario to train side judges and head referees while providing timely feedback to students.

The final timeframe pursued bunkai (application of techniques) within Seisan and Seiuchin katas.

Many thanks to Master David Holcomb for hosting the event. For more information regarding Bryan College, please access their website at: www.bryan.edu





About The Newsletter

Just as in our dojo training, the newsletter is about sharing and improving as a group. We regularly have contributions and updates from Quebec to British Columbia in Canada, as well as from Germany, New York and the Southern United States. Everyone is always welcome in my Dojo or to share via the newsletter.

Articles are welcome from anyone and everyone. They can be about anything related to the Martial Arts, a technique you think is just great; A better way to do a technique; History of a Karate Master; a tournament trick that works well; ANYTHING!

All articles are appreciated as e-mail. You can send it to your instructor to proof read and send in, or directly to me. (sensei@isshinryu.ca)

You can even include pictures if it helps your article!

Karate Terms

Barai Sweeping Block

Bunkai Application of Technique

Dachi Stance

Dojo Training Hall

Hai Yes

Hajime Begin

Kenko Health

Keri Kick

Kihon Exercises

Kobudo Ancient Martial Way

Kumae Guard Position

Kumite Free Hand/ Fight

Kyu Level or Grade

Mo Ichi Do One more Time

Mokuso Meditate

Nukite Spear Fingers

Rei Bow

Ryu Way

Sanchin Three Battles

Seiuchin Control, Pull, Fight

Shitogi Gi pants

Uwagi Gi jacket

Numbers

Ichi one

Ni two

San three

Ju ten

Ju-san thirteen

Seisan thirteen

**There is no wealth like knowledge,
and no poverty like ignorance.**

Buddha