

# The Martial Arts

A Christian: Perspective and Philosophy

by Dr. Kent Haralson

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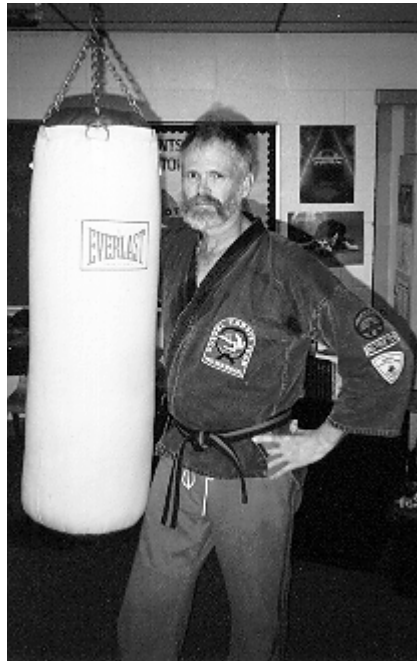
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# Chapter 1

## Overview

“In the beginning God...”, thus begins the Bible in Genesis 1:1. It is logical for man to search for his roots and beginnings. Where did I come from? Where am I going? What is the meaning of life? These are questions that man has pondered for several millennium. The Deists of the eighteenth century extended the laws of physics from the natural realm to the spiritual realm. They observed the laws of cause and effect and derived that for every “effect” there must be a “cause”. Carried backwards this lead to their concept of a “First Cause” (56).

The martial arts is no different. Clearly we can see the martial arts in its many manifestations in the world today. But where did it come from? What are its real roots? What was its real purpose? Somewhere between now and “In the beginning...” the concept of the martial arts was developed. It is the purpose of this book to trace the roots of the martial arts to their “First Cause.”

It is clear to any serious student of the martial arts that what is viewed on the movie and television screen and what is on the pages of the magazine racks is a far cry from the true meaning of the martial arts. In the Foreword to his book *The Making of a Martial Artist*, Sang Kyu Shim states that the martial arts are “much more than sport, display, or means to money, they are concerned with more than physical fitness, fighting skills, and conditioning. While the martial arts do, indeed, involve physique, they are more concerned with the why, how, where and when of physical involvement. They predicate the philosophic foundation through which they ultimately become a way of life. They decompartmentalize living so that the same principle energizes every moment.

While following their pattern, one sets oneself free” (25).

While there is no dispute that the modern martial arts movement can trace itself to the Orient, it is my contention that one must continue to trace the “cause” and “effect” chain beyond Korea, Japan and China to India, to the Middle East and to the warrior of the Old Testament Biblical times. In this book, I will make a case for self-defense from a Biblical standpoint and provide Biblical illustrations of the use of the martial arts.

This book will address several diverse topics to demonstrate a common beginning of culture, language and religion. As mankind was dispersed throughout the world as a result of the incident at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), his common language, culture, religion and martial arts skills were taken with him. Over the intervening centuries the original purity was lost and variations continued to creep into each of these areas. The image was marred, but not so much so as to obliterate the form of the original.

Having considered an evidence of common origin we will then trace the martial arts backwards in time using secular sources. This book will then close with a proposal for reclaiming the martial arts and restoring them to the original purpose and value.

It is the intent of this book to demonstrate that the Bible provides a strong basis and command for the use of the martial arts, and that the original martial arts were indeed those from the Biblical Old Testament era.



## **Chapter 2**

### ***The Martial Arts — A Definition***

A definition of terminology is imperative. Ask a person if they believe in God, and the vast majority will answer in the affirmative; ask what they believe about God, and the diversity will become obvious. Likewise, the martial arts can mean one thing to those who have had their minds saturated with movies and television, and will mean something else to the student of the martial arts. It will take on a totally different meaning when you approach a master of the martial arts, especially a traditional master. In this section, I will consider not only what the martial arts are, from a traditionalist view point but I will also discuss what they are not. With that as a composite definition, we can then consider the origins of the martial arts from common ground.

We cannot begin to define what the martial arts is until many popular misconceptions are peeled away (25).

- First, the martial arts is not a security blanket. The martial arts can provide a means of self-defense or, if necessary, of aggressive behavior, but if this is all it provides, then the user has sold himself short on the better part of the martial arts.
- Secondly, the martial arts does not mean conformity. The martial arts points to the uniqueness of the individual. An operative base is established by imitation of a master form. However, once this is achieved, the student is encouraged to build on his own, to adapt the means to achieve his own needs, his personality, his place in society.
- Thirdly, the martial arts is not merely a sport, because sport is not a way of life in its true sense.
- Fourth, the martial arts is not intended as a form of idle entertainment. The study of the martial arts cannot be put on and taken off like a garment; it

cannot be a role-playing performance.

- Fifth, the martial arts is not a political device. When it is used to achieve political victory, or when used to humiliate political opponents, its users are in direct contradiction to the prime purpose of the martial arts.
- Sixth, it is not a skill to be used for street-fighting and other forms of illegal violence. If a student of the martial arts takes up training with the intention of becoming a fighter, he must soon give up the notion of street-fighting or give up his study, because no true martial arts master will keep a student who would bring his art into such dishonor.

Martial arts are not just raw physical technique, nor is it any one physical technique. The technique could be karate, judo, archery, fencing, bayonet fighting, spear fighting, lance, mach, shield, battle-ax, sword, scimitar, dagger or knife, aikido, stick, and explosive powder. The word “martial” was introduced into the English language by Godfrey Chaucer in the fourteenth century. It was employed by young men of breeding, who were schooled in the martial arts of their era. They were taught the use of the sword, battle-ax, and the arts of Toerney, using lance, mace and shield (3). It involved military training along with character development and proper etiquette (23).

With traditional definitions of the martial arts, at least in the Orient, a sense of non-violence is also prevalent. Masutatsu Oyama teaches that “the essence of karate, therefore, is nothing else than a training of mind over body” (50). Clement Riedner continues this thought pattern with “The achievement of a maturity in the martial arts leads to the denial of violence, and the promotion of peace rather than war”. Karate denies

violence because it:

- produces a sense of calmness and serenity. It promotes peace within the student, the lack of which often leads men to acts of violence.
- It produces a preparedness which forestalls violence, both in the karate student, and in the one who might attempt to attack him.
- It prevents self-assertiveness, so often one of the key factors in aggression against one's fellow man (27).

Daeshik Kim deals more fully with this non-aggressive attitude. According to Kim, the main cause for the occurrence of this sublimation is the confidence created by the ability to defend oneself, and the shift in interest from martial arts as a fighting skill to martial arts as an art form, via increasing emphasis on the forms. A person engaged in this activity would have less emotional need to be aggressive, although he might think it justified to fight on certain occasions (24). Bruce Haines, in his history of the martial arts credited Taoism as a philosophical foundation for several Oriental martial arts (9). Commenting on Taoism, Allan Watts in his book on Zen said that "Taoism is never violent, its ends are achieved by noninterference (Wu-Wei), which is a kind of psychological judo" (57).

In expounding the merits of Kenpo, James Mitose said "Kenpo does not mean violence. If you were to ask me who, in American history, was the best master of Kenpo. I would say Abraham Lincoln. I should choose Lincoln because of his honesty and gentle disposition. He was gentle as a woman and his faith was like that of a child. But to protect human rights, he fought wholeheartedly and with unwavering determination to win. Though the odds were overwhelming, he would still fight for the right. This is the mark of a true master of



Kenpo” (53).

Most definitions of the martial arts address the totality of the martial arts and the balance required of the practitioner. Clement Riedner writes that “only the martial arts (as opposed to sports) contain within them a philosophical foundation which enables them to train the entire person for a lifetime” (27). Keith Yates writes that the “Oriental warrior arts have historically been more than just methods of fighting. They have been deeply involved in philosophies and religions of the Far East. Many systems were, in fact, developed within a deep framework of religious precepts” (22). Elsewhere in his text, Yates states that the more “traditional masters maintain a spiritual emphasis.” There is a strong moral and spiritual dimension to the martial arts. A true practice of them “returns benefits of skill, awareness and good moral judgment.” An ethical foundation is created by rigid training (24).

In the introduction of their book, Susan Ribner and Richard Chin state that most martial arts retained the underlying philosophy of Shaolin, which is a means for developing physically, mentally and spiritually. This is the difference between street fighting and the true martial arts (16).

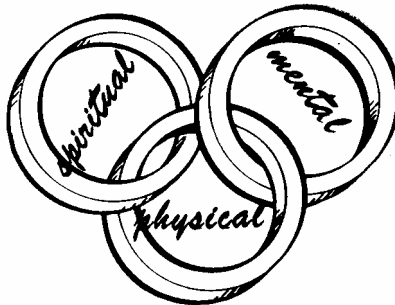
The martial arts are closely related to philosophy, religion, science, and arts, insofar as they attempt to establish human life in some satisfying and meaningful relation to the universe, and to afford some wisdom in the conduct of human affairs. They are religious in that an inherent element in them is the development of moral character. In their capacity as art, as a physical exercise, and as a spiritual discipline, the martial arts are a method of unifying the matter and spirit in such a way as to infinitely broaden and deepen human life. In the matter of method, the martial arts are allied to science. They are demonstrable, capable of analysis, and functional. They are scientific in their use of

anatomical data. They are intelligible, logical, and highly structured in both form and content. Their techniques are precisely definable in space and time.

On the other hand, the martial arts are not just another form of philosophy, religion, science, or art. They differ from philosophy in that they are more than theory, from religion in that they make no claim to being supernatural, and from science in that they accept certain realities as inexplicable in purely scientific terms (25).

The martial artist is the total man who “does not expose himself needlessly to danger since there are few things for which he cares sufficiently (to do that); but he is willing in great crisis to give even his life — knowing that under certain conditions it is not worthwhile to live. He is of a disposition to do men service, though he is ashamed to require service of others. To confer kindness is a mark of superiority...(The superior man) does not take part in public displays” (36).

The martial arts are a way of life. Given the right religious foundations, they are a means to creative self-actualization and service to others. In their proper exercise they provide the necessary discipline, control, and fortitude needed in the pursuit of perfection and the realization of virtue in everyday life.



## **Chapter 3**

### ***Self Defense And The Bible***

#### **A. Objections to the Martial Arts**

With the growth of the martial arts in the United States over the past 40 years, Christians have been faced with some difficult questions. Can a Christian, in good conscience, undertake a study which is supposedly designed to harm others? Can a Christian become involved in a lifestyle so tightly bound to the Orient with its cults and spiritism? Doesn't the Bible teach the Christian to turn the other cheek and refrain from violence?

At the same time, the Christian is to be in good physical condition, mentally alert, disciplined, and able to care for his own family. He must have strong self-control, be faithful and steadfast in pursuit of goals, and portray a sincere humility and servant's heart. The martial arts have long held to these basic tenets, and a serious student will acquire them. Thus, the earnest Christian faces a dilemma. Can he or she stay true to the Bible and be a martial artist? Let's answer these questions as well as lay the framework for any martial arts system that would be true to its origin.

First, I would caution the reader. If you are a sincere Christian, you may have a difficult decision to make. You may no longer be able to remain affiliated with your school because of its teachings or practices. Then too, if you are a sincere martial artist you may have to rethink and change several areas of your particular style so that you can maintain your link to the original teachings.

I have encountered several well-meaning Christians who have questioned my involvement in the martial arts. My martial arts teams conducted more than 200

public demonstrations over a twenty five year span of time to thousands of people. Frequently, it was brought to my attention that a certain youth group would not be able to attend a demonstration due to a sincere position held by the leader that the martial arts were not a proper Christian influence. The issues raised can be grouped into three general questions:

- How can a Christian be involved in something which promotes violence?
- The martial arts are rooted in, or at least connected with, Oriental spiritism or the occult. Shouldn't a Christian avoid that?
- The Bible prohibits the use of force. How can a Christian justify his participation?

Let's look at each of these in more depth.

## **1. Christian Involvement in a Violence Promoting Sport**

I would be the first to admit that there is validity in these issues. My contention is, however, that given the right instructor and the proper focus on the martial arts, none of these issues need be of concern. To the contrary, in that setting, the martial arts can provide those positive character traits and training that the Christian desires.

Much of the cause of the problem in this area is a false impression of the true martial arts based on what one would see on the screens of today's movies, television programs, and videos. Man will naturally gravitate toward activities that please and excite the sensual and the physical. This is a direct result of the fall of man and to be expected, if not accepted, as the norm. The motion picture industry all too well caters to that desire. Thus, we see frequent violence, unnecessary vengeance, quick ill-tempered responses, and a seeking for the "mystical" spiritual oneness and self-satisfying justification in one's

actions. This does not represent the true martial arts, but unfortunately it forms the common perception. It is also the motive behind many beginning practitioners. A better, although still inaccurate, portrayal of the martial arts could be seen in the television show of the late 1960's titled "Kung Fu" with actor David Carradine. Here you see a true servant's heart, and active avoidance of violence, tremendous self-control and discipline, an ability to effectively disarm an aggressor with minimal force, and a very important dependence on the spiritual dimension (albeit, not the Spirit of the original martial arts as will be demonstrated later).

A true approach of the martial arts is to avoid violence. Proverbs 20:3 states that "only fools insist on quarreling." Romans 12:18 states that "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." We will see this verse again, but for now let us consider this command to the Christian as a martial artist. A bonafide martial arts school will train and develop in its students several character traits. Among these would be an ethical system including justice, courage, benevolence, politeness, veracity or honesty, honor, duty, loyalty, and self-control (8). With these character traits and a solid physical capability to utilize the weapons that God gave us, a martial artist would:

- have no need to "prove" himself when insulted or taunted.
- have the mental "mind leading" abilities to control or disarm a threatening situation
- recognize the immaturity in resorting to physical means to resolve a conflict (more disciplined)
- avoid places where fights are likely (pool halls, video arcades, bars, back alleys,...) because he is not only wiser, but also because he has developed a higher degree of mortality.

The “fruit” of the Christian martial artist should match that which is identified in Galatians 5:22-23: “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control...”. This list is remarkably similar to that in the previous paragraph identified by Inazo Nitobe in the book referenced above (8), written in 1899. If the instructor of your martial arts school does not teach this dimension and, more importantly, live it, then I would encourage you to seek another school. Every martial art is based on a spiritual system, which then provides a mental approach, resulting in a physical style and a code of etiquette to guide its usage. Thus, it is not only wrong, but dangerous to study from an instructor who has the wrong spiritual or mental position, regardless of how “effective” the physical skill might be. In the same vein, if the instructor possesses this set of characteristics, then it would be virtually impossible for a student with the wrong motives to last long enough in that school to learn enough to be dangerous. Either he will quickly despair at the regimen required and quit, or he will gradually acquire the patterns of his role model, the instructor, again pointing to the importance of the proper instructor. Finally, consider the alternatives. Assume that you are confronted with a person determined to harm, rob or take advantage of you. You are unable to avoid it or “talk” your way out of it. What are your options? I suggest four likely outcomes:

- You could allow yourself (or your wife, sister or children who are with you) to be abused, robbed or injured. I remind the Christian reader that I Timothy 5:8 states that if a man does not care for his own family, he is worse than an infidel.
- Without training, you could still try to forcibly defend yourself or those with you. This could result in serious injury to yourself or more

serious injuries to your perpetrator than was necessary.

- You could turn to a friend who was with you and have him do your fighting. However, if it is wrong for you to use violence, it is no better to “hire” another to be your mercenary.
- If you have received the proper training in a variety of martial arts techniques, you could effectively and rapidly stop the attack with a minimal amount of force, and without serious injury to the attacker.

Clearly, the last option is the right response for the Christian and the martial artist.

## **2. The Martial Arts are Connected to Spiritism and the Occult**

Besides excessive violence, another common misconception held by many is that the martial arts originated in the Orient and thus grew out of the religions of the Orient. A serious student of the Bible or of history would quickly see the fallacies of this position. This will be dealt with in later sections of this book.

Given the current state of affairs in the martial arts, this is a valid objection. Indeed, many if not most modern martial arts schools are based on Zen, an Eastern mysticism, or the occult. Again, my premise is that this need not be the case. The Christian is called upon by God in 2 Timothy 2:15 to “study” to find and determine those things which are acceptable to God. The worst thing that a Christian can do is to “adopt” his own rules and program of others or a hierarchy. They may well provide valuable input, but this is not to replace serious study on his own. An

excellent example of this is evident in the area of astrology (31). In Chapter 4 (Ancient Roots) I will discuss this in detail along with similar parallel patterns.

The point to be made is that Satan, in his never ending quest to destroy the “seed of the woman”, Jesus Christ, sought to take systems created and ordained of God and used effectively for God’s purpose, and to pervert them. He took the signs of the heavens and used them to set up a one-world religion pointing to the antichrist. In like manner, Satan took a system of self-defense, self-discipline, and mental control which was used by God with Abraham, Joshua, Caleb, Samson, Gideon, Caleb, David and others, and perverted it for his own use by replacing Biblical truths with his own value system.

Proper and authentic martial arts training involves the development of three areas of the individual. The spiritual, mental, and physical dimension of each person must be challenged and grown in parallel to ensure the proper balance of the martial artist. This is not just a Biblical truth (Luke 2:52, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 1 Samuel 16:23): each of the major religions of the world also stresses these dimensions of the individual. More importantly, the spiritual aspect must be foremost, as it provides the moral system with which the skills will be used. The mental dimension provides the mindleading capabilities and self-discipline that enables one to master and utilize the physical techniques. A further look at each of these dimensions is appropriate to understand where the controversy resides.

The **physical** dimension is merely the application of the laws of physics and body anatomy. It is technique regardless of martial arts style, and cannot be objected to as evil or wrong in and of itself. Moreover, the Bible does place an emphasis on staying in good physical shape (1 Timothy 4:8 and I Corinthians 9:27).



The **mental** dimension is the discipline of the mind. This is where confidence comes from as well as ability to control an intimidating situation. Here too, the Christian should have no objection, but rather a positive emphasis. The Bible frequently references the importance of the mind in the everyday activities of the Christian. Proverbs 23:7 teaches us that "...as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...". If we think we can, or think we can't, we are right. Galatians 6:9 encourages us to keep doing what is right because in the end we will reap our reward if we "...faint not", which means to give up in your mind. I Corinthians 9:27 exhorts us to have mental control of our bodies, for if the body and its desires control our life, our missions/goals will not be achieved. Hebrews 12:3 encourages the Christian to remember Jesus in times of stress and despair, or else we will become "...wearied and faint in your minds". Judges chapter 6 and 7 gives an excellent example of "mind leading" by Gideon, where he effectively defeated a massive army with only 300 soldiers.

The third dimension, the **spiritual**, provides the philosophy by which the arts themselves are taught. This is the area where criticism is valid. It is here that several non-Christian religious systems (including materialism and humanism) have taken over martial arts styles. However, the facts and techniques of the physical and mental dimensions themselves are still the same. Thus, if the spiritual dimension and structure of the style is solid Christian, then the outcome will match that of the original and authentic martial arts. It is not enough to have a Christian as a teacher, the entire style and system must be built upon Biblical truths. Unfortunately, in modern times, this is very definitely the exception, thus, there is reason for concern among Christians. It is not the intent to describe a Christian system in this section. Chapter 6 (Reclaiming The Martial Arts) will address such a program.

Another area of contention relates to a misunderstanding of the concept of Ki. A more detailed response to the issue of Ki will be given in Chapter 4 section F. 3, so I will just give a brief response at this point. How this “force” is explained and implemented can allow unbiblical principles to get a foothold in the martial arts system. Several modern practitioners will reference the Ki or Chi or “power within” and call upon the students to enter a state of meditation, empty their minds and seek the “force”. Clearly, this is a nonscriptural and dangerous practice. However, the Bible does teach that there is a center of gravity and source of strength within the body. Proverbs 3:5-8 tells us how to bring “...health to thy naval...” This can be a controlled use of the natural body adrenaline. In Job 40, the Lord speaks to Job and calls upon him to “Gird up thy loins now like a man...” (verse 7) and again in verse 16 the Lord states that “...his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly.” The word “loins” and “navel” refers to that area of the body just below the navel and in the center of the body. The Lord in giving His final counsel to the churches in Revelations 2:23 states that He is the one “...who searcheth the reins and hearts...” Here we once again see reference to the “essence” of the individual. Thus the concept of “Ki” itself is not wrong, and a Biblical development of it can greatly improve the ability of a martial artist to effectively utilize his skills. This development would have to include the proper form of meditating in the word of God (Psalms 1) and inscribing God’s law within our hearts (Psalms 40:8 and 119:11) as well as proper physical and mental training to focus the center of gravity and power of the body.

### **3. The Bible Prohibits The Use Of Force**

People will commonly in a glib fashion state that the Bible teaches us to turn the other cheek when injured by another. This clearly shows a lack of in-depth study and searching of the Word of God. It also has contributed to many unnecessary injuries to Christians and others.

Matthew 5:38-42 contains the teaching of “turn the other cheek”. Rather than teaching of pacifism, the Lord is really teaching about the Old Testament law of retaliation. The Jews were very familiar with the Old Testament teachings of “an eye for an eye...” found in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. They also were aware that these Old Testament statements were not commanded punishments, but merely an allowable recourse that one could legally insist upon for the satisfaction of an injury. This was for a very good reason. Laws of behavior, along with appropriate punishment, are essential for any society to exist. These laws of retaliation were given to the Jewish nation to first keep people from breaking the law and destroying society, and second to ensure the punishment was fair and equitable. Thus, in the Matthew passage, Jesus was re-emphasizing the need to forgive an injury to yourself and not insist on punishment other than for the common good. He was stressing that we must not be vengeful (Romans 12:19) and that we must be charitable and help those who would hurt us by developing a servant’s heart.

What does the Old Testament have to say about the use of violence? It would not be difficult at all to fill a book about the sanctioned use of force and attack in the development of the nation of Israel. This was done to not only punish the sins of heathen nations, but also to protect the integrity of the Israelites. One other point must be stressed regarding the Old Testament. During the dispensation of human government, God gave a clear law

for the common good of all. That was the use of capital punishment, to be carried out by the government upon any who committed murder (Genesis 9:6). This law was not part of the Mosaic Law (ceremonial laws) and thus was not a part of the law that was done away with when Jesus came.

In the New Testament, we will also find several Biblical principles regarding the use of force to defend oneself and to uphold the law. One of the more familiar ones is Romans 12:18 where the Apostle Paul teaches us how to behave with those outside of God's family. Here the Word of God states, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceable with all men." Note the most important first word. "If denotes uncertainty and conditionality. To be sure, we are to strive to achieve peace and not cause injury, but it also indicates that there will be situations where this is not possible. In those situations, which is the more Christian response? To cause serious injury to the other, to be seriously injured yourself, or to effectively disarm the situation utilizing a wide range of martial arts techniques? You see, the martial arts is not just punch and kick. To be effective a system should teach the student effective ways to avoid the trouble through mindleading, to enact nerve centers and put a person in a hold while they rethink their motives, to get out of holds without causing injury to the other, and to quickly attack and end a conflict before extended injury can occur. Along with this goes the spiritual and moral system of a responsible code of behavior. The Apostle Paul in I Timothy 5:8 teaches that men are expected to meet the needs and provide for the protection of their family. Without some method of self-defense or reliance on the defense of others (for instance the law enforcement establishment), this would be impossible.

The Lord Jesus Himself utilized force as He drove the money changers from the temple in righteous indignation