

Taekwondo for Life

Taekwondo (TKD) can be much more than just a sport to be enjoyed for itself, but a way of life that enriches and nourishes the bodies and souls of its practitioners. Not every dojang can deliver this additional benefit, but at Master Shin's dojang, the full potential of the practice of TKD can be realized. My goal here is to explain the value of taking advantage of this rare opportunity.

We all know that exercise is good for us, but what you might not know is that its benefits go beyond just physical health. A recent study found that physically fit kids do a lot better in school¹. Regular exercise has also been found to prevent age related decline in brain function². The mechanisms behind why exercise is so good for our brains are beginning to be understood pretty well. New neurons are born in our brains everyday (even in adult brains, contrary to what was previously thought), but they die quickly if we don't need them³. By increasing the blood flow to our brains through exercise, we wake it up, allowing more thought and generation of new ideas. It creates a hunger and motivation in the brain that aids learning and the incorporation of new neurons into our brains. Exercise literally does make you smarter.

What they've found is that while any kind of exercise is good, the best kind is that which requires us to learn new skills. During strenuous exercise the blood flow to the brain increases, and our brains actually work harder. It switches from burning glucose to lactate, and "...actually shifts into a higher gear in terms of activity."⁴ Our brains are extremely receptive to learning through new challenges when we are exercising.

Master Shin's TKD is all about delivering challenges, and what we're learning is how to really thrive. Thriving is having the capacity and motivation to

go after what you really want in all aspects of life (perseverance). It's about being able to shoulder responsibility and stand up to adversity with inner strength and calm (indomitable spirit and self control). Treating others with respect and acting with integrity brings out the best in those around us, and it's returned in kind. Our lives are shaped by how we feel and respond to the world. By learning control over our bodies and minds, we gain the ability to control the direction our lives take, and how we are treated in this life. Master Shin is teaching us to thrive by instilling these important universal values and by strengthening us from the inside out while pushing us to our physical limits. We are challenged to accomplish something great and build strength through adversity every class period.

Most people in our society today don't know what it means to thrive. They may feel like something is missing, but they don't know what. They keep their heads low and try to be content just bumping around in the current. It's easy to overlook the fundamental importance of being physically and mentally fit. Our culture sees fitness as a hobby rather than a priority. Regular exercise isn't included in our busy schedules, and is viewed as a good idea, but optional. And since it's socially acceptable to be a couch potato, it's tough to find the motivation to change inertia. It just doesn't seem worth the effort. As a whole, we've got to be the most physically unfit creature on the planet.

But it is worth the effort. In fact, it's critical if you're interested in getting what you want out of life. And it's the best possible thing you could do for your kids. The lessons they learn in Master Shin's class will become a foundational source of strength for them for their whole lives. They will learn better, deal with adversity better, feel better, and be better people. Everyone wants their kids to be amazing and develop to their maximum potential. This is the way to

do it. And for adults bored in the rut of the daily grind, this is the way out. We all have requirements that must be met before we can begin to reach beyond the bounds of a simple hand to mouth existence. These requirements include having a motivating environment to develop physical and mental fortitude. And for this, we need Master Shin.

The quality of education that you can get at Master Shin's Do Jang is rare, because people generally think of TKD as an extra curricular activity rather than a necessary part of living a complete life. There is low demand for the quality that Master Shin offers, so you won't find many dojangs putting out the effort to really teach TKD according to TKD philosophy. We have something special here. The first step to taking advantage of it is recognizing the value of making TKD a high priority in our lives.

Wendy Ermold

References

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- 2) Radiological Society of North America (2008, December 2). *Exercise Helps Prevent Age-related Brain Changes in Older Adults*.
- 3) Ge, Shaoyu et al., *A Critical Period for Enhanced Synaptic Plasticity in Newly Generated Neurons of the Adult Brain*. Published in Neuron 54, 559-566, May 24, 2007
- 4) Quistorff et al., *Lactate fuels the human brain during exercise*, The FASEB Journal, 2008; 22 (10): 3443