

We forge ourselves in the fire of our own will.

-Han, Enter the Dragon

One rainy night I sat at my kitchen table at my home in Audubon, New Jersey. My mother and father sat on the other side of the table. My father looked at me as sternly as he possibly could and said we will sign you up for karate classes, on the condition that you get good grades in school and you keep your room clean. I was five years old and that was my first memory.

What martial arts means to me? Simply put, Martial arts is my self expression of intellect, and empowerment. This could be more clearly put as my most basic form of self expression. As any true martial artist would understand martial arts through our live becomes so ingrained in our being that it is visible in even our slightest motion. A flick of my wrist is more defined. Cracking of my neck is intimidating. Even my breath is a tribute to martial arts mastery. Knowing that when I focus my breath in my lower abdomen I feel my chi surge. And as I breathe in my chest it's calming and my energies drop. I'm also a prize fighter so everything I eat I need to take into account how it will affect my body. And the physical pain from that I couldn't bare if it was for my martial arts training. I've study martial arts literally my whole life. At this point, 16 years into my career I've studied in about four art forms in my time. I received my first degree black belt in Tang Soo Do when I was 11 and my second degree black belt in Tang Soo Do when I was 15 years old. So then I stayed at this rank for 6 years. During this time I also studied northern Shaolin, Jui Jitsu and Muay Thia. Through my diverse training I've come to have a greater insight into the art of Tang Soo Do. Although every art is essentially a complete fighting style every art also emphasizes one aspect of combat. This is the reasoning behind style. Our style emphasizes kicks and hand strikes I'm a living testament to that. But there is a deeper meaning to every technique in our art. Most do not know them. For instance a lot of martial artist don't understand that our center block is actually a parry and nerve strike. It's a two part technique. See in Shaolin center block is only done with one arm. All energy is focused in one hand instead of the combination of both. Also every striking move we have in our art is also partly a grappling move. Also in general a lot of martial artist over exert their energy in their techniques. So through Jui Jitsu I learned how to grapple for hours and I also can spar for long periods of time by conserving energy and striking at the right time. This is how I earned my nick name "The Machine". In Muay Thai I learned a whole different style of strike so that now I can combine my strikes together for more variety. So you can see it took embracing many styles to find these hidden techniques. Now that I have though, I feel as though I understand the essence of the art, something that most don't. See what I have come to understand

in martial arts there is no path, just options. A path is ridged like I stick and as so can be broken but an art of option cannot be defined let alone broken. In the beginning you need the ridged discipline because you are indeed learning a discipline which in time becomes an art with your growth and understanding. So my Tang Soo Do isn't defined either and to do true justice I couldn't even call it Tang Soo Do. It's my art. I mean of course it's Tang Soo Do but through me. So I myself have redefined the art, my art. And to call it my art would be saying that it only lives in one aspect of me, which is not true so now it should be understood how I represent my martial art in even the slightest movement. In Me there is a single totality, a submission to my life's obsession. My martial art is balanced, complete, full, just as I am.

So this is all good but what is the point of these studies. Self defense is good. But no one devotes their life in the name of self defense. Unless their extremely paranoid or from an under developed country. Its way to impractical saying a gun or can of mace could easily do the trick. So what is my motivation for working to achieve such a skill level? What have I learned of real value in my life's training? Well the discipline was one thing martial arts taught me. The spiritual practice has been a driving force in my life. And the restraint through that has proven to be quite valuable many of times. Probably the most important part of martial arts for me is that it's been a guide in my life. It's put me on a path, as a motivation to succeed, as an insight in philosophy, as a path to physical excellence, and over all empowerment. These things are good. They've brought me through the most trying of times, but then what? Martial arts' is a greater thing than just me. The true meaning of my martial arts training is my teaching. See martial arts is like a lot of other things is a process, you learn the technique, you master and embody the technique, and then you pass it on to the next generation. And the greatest deed I can do is to pass it on to the next generation. It's a martial artist most important role and his most selfless. I could be dead for a thousand years, the dust from my bones gone, my name forgotten, but my contribution to the martial arts could still be evident, I could leave my footprint in the sand of time. And most important make a difference someone else's training, as Henry Brooks Adams once quoted "A teacher effects eternity, he can never tell were his influence stops".

Written By Paul Turner