

Relaxation-Speed-Power-Flexibility

A Physical, Mental and Emotional Triangle

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RELAXATION

Relaxation as practiced in the martial arts is not a state of collapse! Rather it is a state of neutrality, minimal effort being expended to achieve the body posture or movement required. In relaxed fighting posture we seek to eliminate all conflicts whether mental, emotional or physical leaving ourselves in a state of poise.

This allows rapid, easy response without wasted effort so that maximum energy is directed toward our objective. Many posture based exercises seek to isolate the major muscles required for a particular action so that the others can 'let go' of their tension. With only those muscles tense which are required to stand up, the others can hold that minimum tension needed for muscle 'tone'. This in time develops a body which is used to being in a state of unconflicting readiness, each muscle having been differentiated and re-integrated so that a harmonious interaction results.

The same approach applied to mental and emotional states can aid in reducing reactive behaviour and promoting action by choice. Indeed learning to relax our bodies in this way can often be all that is needed to help us in these other ways as well.

When relaxed we do not explode with a hair trigger, we find there is time to clear our conflicts and choose appropriate action. In effect we can move smoothly from place to place (physically, mentally or emotionally) with our internal subjective time apparently slowed. The appearance from outside is of much greater speed and decisiveness in action while others may be more confident of a measured response and so find us easier to deal with.

Relaxed posture then is not a lack of tension rather it is a state of minimal tension, lack of conflict - harmonious neutrality able to move in any direction at will.

SPEED

To say that speed is about quickness sounds trite but somehow the word speed carries connotations of power and perhaps the idea that fast movement should feel powerful at the same time. In fact it seems true that if an action feels fast in these terms then it probably isn't and you are probably trying too hard. The true feeling of 'speed' has more to do with effortlessness and 'lying' than with feeling 'powerful'.

So, in a sense speed is not something to be felt, since it is external, (distance covered per unit time) then it just is; simply a measurement.

Indeed we generally find that by focussing on essentials then we can do fewer things with less effort and so reduce the time it takes to achieve something. So in fighting we reduce actions to a minimum which means for the same speed we are actually dealing with things faster.

A master barely looks as if he is moving but attacks pass him by and he strikes apparently effortlessly wherever he wants. By doing less he deals with his opponent faster often without greater speed. He simply doesn't do as much.

Clearly speed is connected with distance, timing and power, the first two being measurements of how we are placed relative to our adversary in a constantly moving (dynamic) way, the last (power) being connected with how we use our speed. Simple speed, distance and timing are certainly required, but unless our power is focused with intention then speed is just bulk on the move.

So in life, speed unfocused with intention has little power and dissipates energy. At the extreme, unfocused speed is a recipe for 'warp drive' reaction like a sci-fi space ship flicking in and out of existence but not knowing where it is or where it is going next and so lacking penetration.

Speed in our lives is often only seen from the outside, with the person observed being quite unaware of just how fast they are living. By taking careful observation we can begin to measure our own speed and create as much or as little as appropriate - we 'turn it on' or off as appropriate.

POWER

The ability to work at a particular rate in mechanical terms can also be seen in the ability for example to break blocks, tiles etc., as in many martial arts films or demonstrations.

Focusing all our energies with total commitment in a specific way enables a great deal to be achieved in a split second. Here perhaps we can find a hint of how this concept can apply in wider areas - achievement. For the point about power in relation to human beings is that what we are really looking for is the ability to achieve, so direction in an effective way is essential.

In a sense power is the outcome of applying our basic principles and techniques rather than a factor in its own right. What we then have to do is choose to what end we apply this power. Interestingly in following our principles we often find that the choice is already clear. Since personal power based on an open, honest, awareness of reality is actually diminished by manipulative, target oriented application. We achieve the power to live our lives the way we wish, and to create those things that we really want.

Demonstrations of power in martial arts can be seen as tricks, not 'magic' but rather as party pieces that show only the very pinnacle of the mountain without the landscape in which it is set. The paradox of personal power is that it is only achieved by not targeting too closely. If we climb a mountain by looking only at the summit we will fall, but by taking careful steps in the right direction we can eventually reach our peak - our maximum potential - the best that we may be.

FLEXIBILITY

When the irresistible force meets the immovable object then something has to give. Too much structure with everything tied down too tight leads in the end to grid lock.

Every system needs a certain amount of 'slack' to operate in the real world - to be without is to be robotic and even with robots then the more sophisticated we make them the more flexibility we need to build in.

Flexibility: at the extreme an ability to flow round the immovable object or to move out of the way of an Irresistible force but without losing one's own intention.

The willow tree bends in the wind but retains its intention to stay rooted and so survives. On a lesser scale flexibility allows us to work out solutions to problems within our own resources, to a result which is acceptable.

In martial arts flexibility is not just the ability to move one's body in stretching etc., but has more meaning in the sense of being able to keep moving within wide extremes even when put under pressure.

So flexibility is not just about physical articulation, or having a broad education, it has the vital element of being linked to a flexible use of mind/body in order that the interaction does not lock up and so become a head to head confrontation.

Where a confrontation is allowed to arise then a straight contest of strength ensues. Only when some slack is created can a true solution be found.

In mechanics we talk of having freedom in a system i.e. providing a direction of movement where energy can move, without this we have an inhuman and rigid structure which is dysfunctional both personally and socially.

Awareness of tension is clearly an important factor in achieving flexibility, so physically the clearing of emotional blocks to relaxation is a vital aspect. Interestingly these emotional blocks are the same ones that restrict a free and relaxed mind, so again we see a mind/body emotional triangle where each affects the other.

Relaxed use of mind and body does not mean lack of tension (as discussed previously) but suggests minimum i.e. appropriate, necessary tension over our limits, giving free, flexible use of mind and body.

Flexibility coupled with strength will yield resilience and this is generally much more useful than the ability to lock in place.

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