

Stepping Stones

By Dave J. Lomas

The ideal way of cooling down at the end of a training session is to practice a simple meditation routine with the instructors but this is often neglected in many, if not all, the various combat clubs for several various reasons. Some instructors will neglect this training exercise in favour of using the time to practice sparring or some other combat training routine because they think that this item lacks value, but in most cases, this mental discipline is disregarded by the instructors who do not know how to do it or think that it is a specialised item that requires them to be especially trained in before they can teach others. Although there are those who would have us believe that practising or teaching meditation techniques requires specialist tuition, in truth any adopted method of relaxing the body and the mind is just as good so long as the person can feel positive benefit from it. A good meditation period is normally around fifteen to thirty minutes in duration, although it can vary a lot depending on the individuals' requirements. Sometimes a short five minute session can be just as beneficial as a long focused period.

Many people believe that meditation is all about sitting cross-legged on the floor and dozing off to sleep but although the classical way of meditating is to sit cross-legged on the floor this is not a rule that is set in stone and the belief that you just simply let the mind wander until you fall into a nice relaxing sleep is far from the truth. The following is a meditation technique that can easily be learned and practised at anytime.

The first stage is to position oneself in a good comfortable position that can be in the classical cross-legged position or even in a comfortable chair. Choosing a lying down position is also acceptable but will restrict the deep breathing aspect of the procedure. Having positioned yourself make sure that you do not need to scratch your nose or something else that will break your concentration during the meditation cycle as this will require you to return to the start of the procedure all over again.

Now in a good comfortable position commence the procedure by closing your eyes and taking big concentrated deep breaths. When taking these deep breaths avoid just breathing from the throat that we all tend to do throughout the day, (shallow breathing), but breathe in and push the air into the pit of your stomach and then breathe out after holding the breath for a few scant seconds until all of that single breath is forced out completely. Repeat this initial first stage procedure several times before you return to breathing in a more natural way. When performing deep breaths and when breathing more naturally in a relaxed way remember to always breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth.

The next stage is then to focus your physical senses on the things that are nearby. Focus your hearing on the smallest of sounds that you can detect that are near to you, focus your sense of touch on the smallest or slightest of breezes that comes into contact

with your skin and also focus on any smells that you can detect within the room. Feel the sweat dripping down your face and feel the sweat running down your body, (if you have just done a physical workout), but resist the urge to move and wipe the sweat away but instead remind yourself that this sweating action is your body's way of automatically cooling you down which is exactly what you want. During this point of the procedure you must resist the urge to move in anyway.

The slightest movement of your leg, body or arm will mean that you have broken the vital need to remain perfectly still and you will need to restart the entire procedure again. Although you must remain still throughout the entire meditation cycle, and that also includes not moving your finger tip even in the slightest way, you can of course move your chest when breathing otherwise if you stop breathing you would end up passing out instead of felling relaxed - of course.

If you have completed this part of the exercise in the correct way then you will have now become detached from your physical self without even realising it because your mind will be focused on your senses and not your body. This can easily be compared to the fact that no one can detect or be aware of the precise moment in time when you fall to sleep and that you are completely unaware that you are indeed asleep until you wake up. In the case of meditation however you are not asleep but you are instead fully awake and actively using your mind to concentrate on the sounds and smells around you without the time to think about your physical body. It is for this specific reason that it is vital to remain perfectly still during and throughout the entire procedure. At this stage in the proceedings you should now expand your search of sounds and smells to outside of the room that you are in and attempt to detect even the faintest of sounds from far away. This exercise of the senses is to help you forget your physical self and clear your mind of the normal day-to-day things that go constantly through our minds by focusing on the task in hand. There is no set time period for each of these stages as each individual will assess for themselves when it is time to move on to the next level and will in part consciously do so in an easy transitional way.

The final level can be thought of as a game for the mind and is the very level that will put you into a deep period of physical and mental relaxation. This stage involves you picturing yourself as a drawing or cartoon character standing at the top of a bottomless flight of stone steps or stairs.

Viewed in your mind from a side or angled position on a television screen or if you prefer viewed in your mind as if you were looking down this never ending flight of stairs you then proceed to take one step down the stairs every time you feel more relaxed. Repeating this procedure you then progress down the never ending flight of stairs as you become more deeply relaxed, but without cheating on yourself, you must also take one step back up the stairs when you feel any tension whatsoever.

When you feel it is time to end this meditation period simply open your eyes and slowly give yourself a stretch in the same way that you would if coming out of a long sleep. It will be at this stage that you will be aware that you did in fact lose contact with your physical self as you start to move again but did not realise it during the procedure.

Hopefully you are now both physically and mentally more relaxed and the mind is clearer after your meditation period. You can now stand up and welcome yourself back into reality. Due to the main part of this meditation procedure which involves stepping down a flight of stairs or stone steps I have called this exercise the 'Stepping Stones Meditation Technique'. With practice this simple relaxation technique will enhance the health of your mind and body and it will not do your soul any harm either.

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This article was produced in January 2010.

Publishing site: DJLMARTIALARTS.CO.UK