



By █ Pendekar Scott McQuaid

*'Excellence is the mastery of the basics.'*

The martial arts have always had a higher power stigma attached to them, an array of enlightenment and cosmic force whilst preaching the balance of yin and yang.

There are countless techniques and training excises within these arts that lead us to believe that we can become a super being. With Chinese whisper stories of the *dim mak* (death touch) and exaggerated examples of *chi* (body energy), the practicality of studying martial arts can often be lost.

The reasoning behind any combative studies is for protection, self defense against an attacker, to be able, level headed and confident to defend yourself under intense situations.

For those that look for that greatness they see in the movies, a supreme master that can float on air and cause internal damage to the body with a single finger jab will no doubt be disappointed after training at their local dojo for a couple of years only to find themselves still mortal.

Unfortunately there are instructors that not only play on these super powers they are meant to harness but genuinely believe in this theory despite the lack of any real hard evidence. This can come from their previous instructor's teachings or a natural want to believe in something beyond human combat.

The fact remains that this was not why these systems were created and developed. The physical and mental aspects of learning a martial art is to prepare yourself to fight.

The very term martial arts translates to arts concerned with waging war. There was no mysticism behind the styles, it was merely fight for your survival.



Today's mystic elements in the fighting arts are less blatant but there are still instructors who sell the higher power angle to the novice.

The karate guys that break boards with their hands have not captured a super power from meditating in a cave in Japan. They are using physical body mechanics and science to achieve their goal.

The standard boards used in demonstrations are wide pine boards with no knots; they break with the grain using dry wood. When breaking more than one board, spacers are introduced between the boards to make the breaking easier. For example, when you break four one-inch boards stacked on top of each other, it is roughly the equivalent of breaking one 4-inch board. However, when spacers are used, you are breaking four 1-inch boards, one at a time, which is much easier.

The basic principle of board or brick breaking is motion. The more momentum an object has, the more force it can generate. This is not to take away any creditability or skill from the practitioners that perform these demos. It is to note that knowledge gained in body mechanics and selecting the materials is a human trait and not one of a higher power.

The kung fu practitioners that acrobat into the air are prolonging the inevitable conflict of battle. A back-flip is nothing more than a back flip; although the fluid acrobatics will no doubt contribute to the martial artist's flexibility, it is merely window dressing and holds no worth in ending the fight.

True enlightenment within any combative system comes in the knowledge of being in the fight, of knowing how to counter your opponents' attack, to divert your approach in a single moment without hesitation. These are the real higher power aspects of your martial art - to control your reptile instinct in the now of combat, hopefully controlling the outcome of your survival.

