

Observing

By James Theros

When you think of the word "observe," what comes to mind? If you ask most people they will tell you that observing is watching or looking at something. They are partially correct. Observing is much more than just seeing something, though. When we truly observe something, we bring into play all 5 of our senses. We see, hear, smell, taste, and touch it. When practicing the martial arts it is important that we, as students, observe our art.

When we practice a form we must first see it. We use our sense of sight to watch our senior belts perform their forms and we must watch the instructor as he demonstrates specific movements that are included in our form. We then replay that in our mind and try to duplicate what we have seen. Unless we begin to really pay attention we will miss the many details which make the movement have power and beauty.

Next we must smell it. Smell a form? How is that possible? Well, consider this. When watching our senior belts perform their movements we know from experience who is doing it correctly and who is doing it incorrectly. So, in effect, we are "smelling" our senior belts' techniques to find out which ones are good and which ones are bad. It's almost like going shopping for fresh fruit. If you watch an "experienced" shopper you will notice that he will look at the fruit first for good coloring, then he will feel it to check for hardness or softness and then he will give it a sniff to see if the aroma is good. Learning the martial arts is much the same. So, we have to occasionally "smell" our seniors to see if they are ripe or rotten, so to speak.

After we have decided that the smell is good we then need taste it for ourselves. This is when we actually try to perform the movement. Without actually tasting something we cannot assess whether or not it is good. How many times have we told somebody that we didn't like a certain type of food; Then, when we actually had a "taste" of it, decided that we liked it after all? Most of us have had that experience. One can never truly know if he likes something or not until he has tried it. Sometimes we must try it a few times before we find out if we like it or not.

Then we must touch it. You may ask, "well, how can I touch a form? It isn't a solid object." In order to touch a form you have to use your mind and think about the movements in the form. In this way you are touching it. By touching the form we can get a "feel" for it and begin to understand how the movements fit together. We begin to understand the purpose of each movement and are able to decipher the form to the point that, if asked, we can describe how many opponents we are facing and exactly where the opponents are standing. We can also tell what type of an attack has been launched at us; and how to deal with that attack. By "touching" the form with our minds we are able to move to the final phase in observing. Hearing.

Hearing a form. Now that one may have you stumped. How are we supposed to hear a form? It makes no sound, it can't talk to us; or can it? During the process of "feeling" our way through a form we have to sometimes stop and "listen" to the form for answers to our questions. If you practice long enough your form will begin to quite literally "talk" to you. It will tell you when you need to move fast or slow. It will tell you when you need to yell to show where the most powerful movements are. It will tell you how defend against a certain attack, that is, if you are really listening. And, if you listen hard and long enough, it will speak to you about the principles of success that are locked within its' four walls.

Observing is the only way to true mastery of anything. Of you truly use the "art" of observation you may even be able to master "yourself." In the martial arts you have to observe "everything." Think about it, in order to observe your form, don't you first have to observe each "single" technique? If you take things one step at a time, eventually, you look back and you've found that with each "step," you've managed to travel quite a distance from the beginning point. Yet, the road you travel, no matter how far it may take you, always seems to lead back to that very beginning. But, that is another subject all its own, or is it?