

Don't Compare Yourself With Others

By James Theros

I have studied the martial arts for over 20 years now, and I've seen it a thousand times. I have even been guilty of it myself on many occasions. I have seen it keep a person from growing both mentally and physically. I have seen it knock a person right out of their training never to return. What is it I am speaking of? Comparison.

Every person who trains in the martial arts faces it at one time or another, they look at the guy who can bend both legs around his back 3 times, or the guy who kicks so perfect you'd think he was a machine, or the guy in the movies who takes on 15 guys and beats them all with a blink of an eye. Then, they make the mistake of comparing their own abilities with that of these other guys. What usually happens next is that they get frustrated with themselves and begin to look down on their own abilities. This usually is enough to make many people give up their training altogether. It's very sad to see, especially when, as an instructor, you see just how much their martial arts training has helped them and how much potential they have. They give up before they even get started. You probably know someone like this, they normally say, "Yeah, I used to take tae kwon do a few years ago." And when you ask them why they quit, they usually give you an answer like this, "I couldn't afford it anymore," or "I just wasn't any good at it." Nonsense! More than likely what happened was, they took a look at Johnny and saw him drop down into a split as if it were nothing, or watched little Suzie throw a big man to the mat like he was weightless, and decided that they just didn't have the same abilities as these guys and they gave up.

The mistake that they made was to ever begin comparing themselves to Johnny and Suzie in the first place. All of us have different bodies and different abilities, and most importantly, we think differently. When you begin to train in the martial arts, you have to take that into consideration. Remember, the physical training is only a small percentage of what true martial arts training is all about. If you stick around long enough, you will be able to look back to when you first put on your uniform and stepped onto the mat. If you were like me, it was pretty embarrassing. But as time goes on, you'll see that you really have come a long way from where you were in the beginning, and THAT is the only comparison that one needs to make-What was I like then, and how far have I come now? Then you can get excited because you can look at how far you've come, and get excited about how much more you will improve over the next period of time!

When I began my training, I used to compare myself with other students also. I remember that I would always be the last one to learn how to do something. It just seemed to come naturally to the other students and I had to work so hard at it (and still do). But I didn't give up, and you know what- all those guys that I used to compare myself with? They all quit!!! If these guys were so good, then why did they quit? The answer is simple; they didn't take time to get into the mental training that is so important

to a martial artist. When they reached all of their goals, as far as winning trophies and such, they had nothing else to keep them going.

Because I had such a struggle with learning, and because I wasn't as flexible or as fast or as naturally talented as these guys, I had more obstacles to overcome and more goals to set. When I finally did begin to reach some of my goals I had a more profound appreciation for all the work I had done and so I was not prepared to just quit my training because I wasn't as good as Bruce Lee. One thing that I had going for me that was not readily apparent was my commitment and dedication. Because I have always modeled myself after my mentor, Grandmaster Young P. Choi, I also absorbed the mental side of martial arts training as well. Master Choi has said many times that the body loses its abilities long before the mind does, so if you don't train the mind and solely concentrate on your physical skills you will have to stop someday, but if you train the mind AND body, you can train and improve until the day you leave this earth.

So, if you want to compare yourself with others, do it in a positive way. Look at the people who have abilities you admire and try to model yourself after them. There is an old saying "If you shoot for the stars and miss, then you might hit the moon, but if you stay on the ground and never try, you will remain on the ground, the same as you were when you started."