

The Institute of Modern Personal Combat Tactics and Training

PRESENTS



TOUGHNESS TRAINING

Elite Fighter System of Modern Personal Combat

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DEDICATION

The work you are about to read is the single most important document that you will ever read in martial arts literature. In the following pages, you will learn the keys to success in the martial arts and in life. I give full credit to the information herein to my brother, Kevin Lamkin. For it was from his guidance and the lessons he taught that have brought me to where I am today and the paths that I will follow in the future.

PREFACE

The martial art world has always centered around a religious-mystical power source called Chi or Ki. As the fable goes, if you are able to harness Chi, then you will have flawless technique, powerful strikes, and be unbeatable in combat. But what martial artists eventually discover is that no such magic exists. The answers do not lie in some mystical force, but rather in the dedication one shows to training. Expert martial artists discover their Ideal Performance State (IPS) also called “the Zone”. But unlike Chi, the IPS is real and attainable, it is not shrouded in mystery, nor do you have to subscribe to a religious belief. Instead, you train to be **tough**. This is what Toughness Training is all about. Developing yourself to have flawless technique, powerful strikes, and be unbeatable in combat.

TOUGHNESS TRAINING

INTRODUCTION

What is Toughness Training?

Toughness Training is the art and science of increasing your ability to handle all kinds of stress—physical, mental, and emotional—so that you'll be a more effective fighter. It's a highly sophisticated and thoroughly proven method of perfecting your combat skills while minimizing the risk of physical injuries and emotional setbacks that so often attend overtraining.

A key element in Toughness Training is improving your *recover-from-stress routines* during practice. Balancing the stress of training with adequate recovery is vital; failing to do so will always undermine a fighter's potential. To achieve that essential balance you have to know how to recognize when you're out of balance. Toughness Training gives you the necessary skills.

What Does Toughness Training Toughen?

Your mind, body, and emotions will become more flexible, responsive, resilient, and stronger—the real meaning of *tough* as used here—through Toughness Training.

THE REAL MEANING OF TOUGHNESS

Talent, Skill, or Toughness?

To understand the meaning of toughness, you must first grasp the meaning of talent and skill. Everyone has talent—some have it big, some not so big. Talent is genetic potential. Theoretically, talent defines the outer limits of your athletic potential.

Now, let's look at the notion of skill. Whereas talent is a gift, skills are learned. The mechanics of kicking, punching, and grappling are skills. They are acquired through hard work, repetition, and practice. Theoretically, skills affect achievement in martial arts in much the same way that talent does. Poor physical skills seriously limit potential for success, and great physical skills open it up.

Talent and skill are important contributors to achievement in martial arts, but they are obviously not the most important factors. There are many highly successful martial artists that exist today who are not gifted. So, what is the critical factor in martial art achievement? The answer is *Toughness*.

What Toughness Is

Countless myths persist about the real meaning of toughness. Tough has nothing to do with the killer instinct or being mean. It also has nothing to do with being cold, hard, insensitive, calloused, or ruthless. The definition of toughness is:

TOUGHNESS IS THE ABILITY TO CONSISTENTLY PERFORM TOWARD THE UPPER RANGE OF YOUR TALENT AND SKILL REGARDLESS OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

Although this explanation seems simple enough, a much deeper understanding is necessary before we can move forward. To help you with this, I've expanded the above definition further.

Toughness is Learned—Make no mistake about it: toughness has nothing to do with genetics or inherited instincts. It is acquired in precisely the same way all skills are. If you don't have it, it simply means you haven't learned it. Anyone can learn to get tougher at any stage in his life.

Toughness is the skill that enables you to bring all your talent and skill to life on demand—If you have toughness, you can achieve great things regardless if you have talent or skill. With toughness you can learn whatever mechanical skills you need, and toughness will push your talent to its absolute limits. Only through toughness can you discover your real limits. Far too many martial artists sell themselves short by assuming they are not talented enough. The limiting factor for most martial artists is not talent but toughness.

Toughness is Ideal Performance State control—An Ideal Performance State (IPS) exists for every martial artist. It's simply the optimal state of physiological and psychological arousal for performing at your peak. Arousal is reflected in heart rate, muscle tension, brain wave frequency, blood pressure, and a host of other measures. IPS is typically accompanied by a highly distinctive pattern of feelings and emotions. You are most likely to experience IPS and perform at your peak when you feel:

- Confident
- Relaxed and calm
- Energized with positive emotion
- Challenged
- Focused and alert
- Automatic and instinctive
- Ready for fun and enjoyment

Emotions run the performance show—Emotion runs the show in martial art training. Some emotions are empowering and free your talent and skill; other emotions are disempowering and effectively lock your potential out. Empowering emotions are those associated with challenge, drive, confidence, determination, positive fight, energy, spirit, persistence, and fun. Disempowering emotions are those associated with feelings of fatigue, helplessness, insecurity, low energy, weakness, fear, and confusion. The reason emotion is so important is its connection to arousal. Emotions are biochemical events in the brain that can lead to a cascade of powerful changes in the body. These changes either move you closer to or further away from your IPS. Fear moves you away, confidence brings you closer; temper and rage move you away, fun and enjoyment bring you back.

Toughness is the ability to consistently access empowering emotions during training and combat—Learning to access empowering emotions during training and combat is the basis for learning to be a great fighter. Emotional control brings you bodily control.

Toughness is mental, physical, and—ultimately—emotional—What you think and visualize, how you act, when and what you eat, the quantity and quality of your sleep and rest, and especially your level of fitness, can all have profound effects on your emotional state at any given time. As you will see, tough thinking, tough acting, fitness, proper rest, and diet are prerequisites for feeling tough. Too many martial artists make the mistake of believing that toughness is strictly a mental feat.

In the final analysis, toughness is physical—The body is physical; talent and skill are physical; and thinking and visualization are electrochemical events in the brain and are also physical. Martial artists often make the mistake of believing that what they think, particularly negative thinking, has little effect on their performance. Since they can't see their thoughts and emotions, they view those thoughts and emotions as not as real or as important as the physical aspects. Thoughts and feelings are just as real and every bit as fundamental to achievement as talent and skill.

Summary

Never limit yourself by believing you are not talented enough or smart enough, or that you haven't been given the genetic gifts to achieve great heights. Your future is determined far more by what you do than what you are genetically. The most powerful force in your life as a martial artist will clearly be your acquired level of toughness. And the toughness you learn for the martial arts will also prove invaluable to you in the greater arena of life.

ACCESSING YOUR PERFORMER SELF

Performing toward the upper range of your talent and skill is directly related to your ability to maintain an Ideal Performance State. Mobilizing your body's performance potential requires a very special kind of psychological and physiological balance. Feelings of relaxation, calmness, high energy, positiveness, alertness, focus, confidence, instinctiveness, determination, and enjoyment form the basis of this delicate state and reflect a very special condition of bodily arousal.

Feelings and emotions simply mirror what's happening deep within your body's physiology. For example, feeling relaxed reflects the amount of electrical energy being transmitted through the muscles of your body. When your muscles feel tight it means a great deal of bioelectrical energy is being delivered, and feeling loose means the opposite.

Feelings of calmness, alertness, and focus reflect a particular pattern of neurological (brain) arousal. Feelings of confidence, energy, aggressiveness, and fun reflect a very specific bio-chemical and neurological balance in the body. Feelings of helplessness and fatigue are rooted in opposing bio-chemical processes. Blood sugar levels, blood sugar stored in the muscle (called glycogen), levels of adrenaline and noradrenaline, and concentrations of special brain hormones (called neurotransmitters and neuropeptides) are just a few of the factors that influence our moment-to-moment feelings and emotions during training and combat.

When your feelings shift from confident to fearful, powerful changes occur in the brain's chemistry that can profoundly influence coordination and balance, concentration and muscle-response accuracy.

Feelings and emotions, like the instrument gauges of a fighter jet, constantly feed back information about the internal condition of our bodies and our capacity for continued energy expenditure. Negative feelings and emotions may point to critical bodily deficiencies that should be immediately tended to, such as the need to consume more cold water to prevent further dehydration or to consume more carbohydrates to raise blood sugar. The chemistry underlying our negative feelings and emotions can block your efforts to achieve Ideal Performance State *control*. This makes our emotional state during training and combat crucial to success.

The Performer Self Versus the Real Self

The way you really feel and the way you need to feel to perform at your best level may be worlds apart. In the context of Toughness Training, the way you really feel is called your **Real Self** and the way you need to feel to perform at your peak is called your **Performer Self**. Understanding how the two interact is fundamental to becoming a tough fighter.

Feelings and emotions are flowing all the time, some positive and some negative. Emotions are really body talk carried on by the body's chemical messengers. Positive emotions generally signal balance and health; negative emotions typically signal unmet needs of some kind. ***Each and every negative feeling and emotion that we experience serves a purpose.***

Some negative states signal important unmet needs and some signal trivial needs. A child crying because of hunger obviously has an important unmet need; a child crying because his mother won't buy a certain toy sends quite a different message. Similarly, a fighter feeling low energy and helplessness due to excessive water loss clearly has an important unmet need; becoming angry and throwing a temper tantrum because someone connected a flawless sidekick to his rib cage reveals quite another need.

The important thing to remember here is that the body gets its needs met by sending chemical messengers that take the form of feelings and emotions. This brings attention to whatever condition of imbalance that exists within the body. Needs can be physical, such as hunger and thirst, or they can be psychological, such as needs for recognition, approval, and self-esteem. *Toughness* comes from responding to negative messages in appropriate ways; if you totally block them out, meeting your needs becomes virtually impossible, meaning that your combat performance will go into a steep decline.

The fighter's dilemma surfaces here. We know the feelings and emotions we need to feel during training and combat to perform at our best (IPS) level, but the reality is that what we need to feel may be light-years from the way we actually feel. Feelings of confidence, high energy, relaxation, enjoyment may never appear at all or suddenly evaporate at the first sign of trouble. Confidence may be replaced with fear, relaxation with tightness, energy with fatigue, enjoyment with frustration or anger—the list goes on and on. Corresponding changes in brain chemistry and physiology accompany these shifts in feelings.

Summary

When basic needs for food, rest, sleep, water, and so forth are not met, toughness and IPS control quickly become unattainable. The same thing holds true emotionally: when one's emotional needs are not adequately met before entering training or battle, particularly those associated with self-esteem and self-worth, the problems with nerves, self-doubt, frustration, and perceived failure are inevitable.

Another requirement for toughness is a highly developed and skillful Performer Self. The ability to move from the Real Self to the Performer Self on demand calls for precise thinking and acting skills.

The final requirement is the capacity to endure great physical, mental, and emotional stress. *A fundamental component of toughness is physical fitness.* A low tolerance for physical stress typically means the battle will be lost before it begins. Once fighters reach their physical limits, it's like unplugging the computer from its power source. Toughness requires great *physical* flexibility, responsiveness, strength, and resiliency.

The same thing holds true emotionally. Toughness also requires a great capacity for mental and emotional stress, and great flexibility, responsiveness, strength, and resiliency.

As you will see in later chapters, this capacity is acquired only through exposure to a specific level of stress. Too little stress and overprotection, or too much stress and overstimulation, reduces your capacity for coping effectively with the challenges of training and combat.

THE FIGHTER AS ACTOR

Do you think that your opponent cares if you have a headache or a sinus infection? Not on your life. The only thing that your opponent cares about is pounding your face into the ground. So, what do Elite Fighters do when they do not physically feel well and they are faced with an opponent? How do Elite Fighters overcome the stress from work in order to focus on their training sessions? Here's how: they learn exceptional performer skills.

Research has confirmed that the physiological changes that occur in the acted-out (faked) emotion are the same as those that occur in spontaneous, genuine emotion. And how does this research relate to the martial arts? Elite Fighters have learned to bring to life feelings of confidence, high energy, relaxation, and challenge no matter how they really feel.

EMOTIONS RESPOND MUCH AS MUSCLES DO.

THE ONES YOU STIMULATE THE MOST BECOME THE STRONGEST AND MOST ACCESSIBLE.

The skills needed to access targeted emotions are called **performer skills** and generally involve three things:

1. Disciplined thinking and imaging skills.

The thoughts and images you carry in your head have precise emotional consequences. Undisciplined thinking and imaging generally kicks your emotional targets far out of range.

2. Disciplined physical acting skills.

The way you carry your head and shoulders, the look on your face, the way you walk, your body language, also have precise emotional consequences. Acting the way you feel generally intensifies whatever emotion that may be present. Acting the way you want to feel to achieve IPS moves you closer to your intended emotional targets.

3. Emotional response practice.

If you're hoping for a new emotional response to the same old problem and you haven't had a chance to practice, the odds are strongly against you. Emotional responses need time and stimulation to grow, just as muscles do. Emotional responses require practice time—the more intense, the better—to train the underlying biochemical mechanisms.

Performer Skills of Fighters

1. Tough Thinking

This is simply your ability to use words and images to control your Ideal Performance State. This means disciplined thinking and visualization during training. Tough thinking will keep you from losing your temper when you make the unthinkable mistake and prevent you from surrendering when the battle appears lost. Here are some examples of tough thinking.

When you are training and your lungs are burning, you feel exhausted, think:

"This is really tough—but I'm a whole lot tougher!"

When you feel tired, burned out, negative, and weak before class even starts, think:

"Today will be a great challenge for me. I've got to be super-tough today to make it. If I can do it here and now, I can do it anywhere. I'm going to hang in there no matter what! No excuses!"

When your life is in danger and you feel like giving in, think:

"I never surrender! Not me. Not ever. I will fight until it's over and I am victorious!"

2. Tough Acting

This is simply your ability to use your body to control your Ideal Performance State. This means disciplined, precise acting during training and combat. Like tough thinking, tough acting is a powerful weapon with which to control fear, anger, helplessness, and doubt. Here are some examples:

When you feel that your energy is gone—Force yourself to look as fresh as if you'd just rolled out of bed on the greatest day of your life.

When you make the worst mistake possible—Quickly turn away from the mistake and show nothing on the outside but supreme confidence.

When the enemy is approaching—Look courageous. Act courageous. Think victory!

Can the Performer Self become too dominant?

If you don't develop and use your performer skills you probably won't accomplish much. Your talent and skill will remain largely untapped. On the other hand, if your Performer Self dominates your personality, important needs of the Real Self often get suppressed and therefore remain unmet. When the Performer Self dominates a person's personality, a characteristic sense of phoniness is given off. The person will often begin to mask his mistakes rather than improve them. True toughness in martial arts requires a great balance.

NOT BEING TOUGH ENOUGH CAUSES YOU PAIN

The ultimate measure of your toughness is the extent to which you can consistently perform toward the upper range of your talent and skill. Another measure, surprisingly, is *pain*.

Let's look at physical toughness first. How do you know when you've exceeded your body's capacity for coping with physical stress? Think about running, weight lifting, or doing push-ups. The closer you get to your absolute limits, the more discomfort you feel. When you clearly exceed your limits, pain hits.

Therefore, if you can sustain a great volume of physical stress without pain, you have acquired a high level of physical toughness. Martial artists with poor physical fitness are always hurting or injured. This stems from their being in a constant state of physical over-training because their bodies have such a low tolerance for physical stress.

What do instructors get from their physically non-tough students? Constant complaints about how their bodies are always hurting or breaking down. The same holds true both mentally and emotionally: exceeding your capacity for coping mentally or emotionally also results in pain. Psychological pain comes in the form of negative feelings and emotions.

If you're not tough enough mentally and emotionally, it shows as persistent negative thinking and feeling. Just as in the physical realm, martial artists suffering from these weaknesses are also in a constant state of mental and emotional over-training. Because their capacity to cope can't meet the day-to-day psychological demands to train, they are always complaining, always negative.

Examples of mental and emotional pain include the following:

- Mental and emotional fatigue
- Persistent negative thinking
- Bad moods
- Depression
- Nervousness and anxiety
- Boredom
- Low motivation
- Low enjoyment
- Low self-esteem and confidence
- Burnout
- Feeling defensive and threatened

The more pain you experience mentally, physically, or emotionally, the greater the chance that you simply aren't tough enough. The martial artist who enters training totally unprepared and unfit offers a good example. All the pain and discomfort felt in the training class signal overtraining. Constantly exceeding your limits spells big trouble in terms of injuries, broken confidence, and poor performance.

WHY AREN'T YOU TOUGH ENOUGH?

Why are some martial artists tough and others not? Why do some martial artists choke or go crazy with anger in situations where others stay calm and focused?

To answer these questions, let's explore what might be termed nontough emotional responses. You've learned that toughness is a learned capacity to produce a unique emotional response in training and combat. That emotional response might best be embodied in the word *challenge*. When you're challenged you're positively engaged, mobilized, moving forward. The *challenge feeling* often accompanies feelings of fun, positive fight, confidence, and focus. To consistently *respond with challenge* when things get rough during training requires great emotional skill. Let's look at the least skillful and most primitive emotional response to the stresses of training—simply giving up inside, also called “tanking”.

Excuse-making is one of the most common forms of tanking. Martial artists also use the withdrawal of effort to control their nerves. Tanking is particularly common among fighters who have been labeled gifted or talented. To preserve their image of being talented, martial artists create a thousand and one excuses to explain poor performances. The most talented martial artists often become the worst head cases precisely for that reason. These excuses help protect his pride and ego.

Although tanking will lessen your pain and reduce your nervousness, it carries a staggering price tag: tankers never fulfill their potential. When you withdraw energy, motivation, or effort, everything starts shutting down, meaning that the battle to bring your talent and skill to life certainly will be lost.

So, for those martial artists who tank in any form, the answer to the question of why they are not tough enough is:

THEY FAIL TO GIVE THEIR BEST EFFORT AND THEN REFUSE TO
ACCEPT FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE OUTCOME

Anger

Once you learn to control the tanking response, your next emotional obstacle will be anger and negativism. Martial artists who fuel their training and sparring sessions with negative emotion never achieve real toughness. Anger, temper, and negativism often serve as misguided attempts to protect the Real Self (ego) from pain and, just like tanking, can drive nervousness away. Once that connect is made, the temptation to use negative thinking and emotion to control choking and emotional pain can become powerful.

It's important to note the negativism can flow in two directions, toward self or away from self. Of the two, self-directed anger and negativism disrupt Ideal Performance State control the most, and inflict the greatest damage to the Real Self.

Fueling performance with the chemistry of anger is like pouring gasoline on a fire to keep it going. Sometimes you get away with it, but all too often the fire blows up in your face.

Here are some of the ways anger and negativism are used by martial artists during training.

To reduce pressure—Telling yourself you're stupid, dumb, or brain-dead reduces expectations and helps control nerves.

To increase arousal—Martial artists learn to use anger and temper to get themselves more activated and stimulated. Anger clearly mobilizes more fighting energy.

To prevent choking—Anger can definitely overcome fear. This gives the martial artist a powerful temptation—made more irresistible by repetition—to blow helplessness and fear away with temper. Nobody likes feeling helpless. Most martial artists would gladly trade fear for anger.

From the above examples it's easy to see why so many martial artists get off track with negative emotion. Although superior to tanking as a strategy for managing pressure, negative emotions obviously won't take you where you want to go. So, for those martial artists who use negativism in any form, the answer to the question why they are not tough enough unmistakably is:

THEY FAIL TO FUEL THEIR COMPETITIVE FIRES WITH POSITIVE EMOTION

Choking

Once the fear-reducing strategies of tanking and anger are no longer used, martial artists come face to face with the choking response. Choking means performing poorly because of fear. Fear unleashes powerful, primitive hormonal responses that can be extremely disruptive to performance.

Martial artists who choke are clearly tougher and more emotionally skilled than those who either tank or use temper and negativism to cope. Here are some basic truths about choking:

- Everyone chokes sometimes. No matter how tough you get you'll always be vulnerable to choking.
- Choking simply means you care and are engaged emotionally.
- Toughness means *being able to cope with choking* rather than being able to eliminate it.
- Tough thinking and tough acting will help substantially in controlling the choking response.
- Choking is a biochemical event. The hormones associated with fear are real and so are the effects.
- Choking is not all in your head!

So, why do some martial artists choke more often than others? Why are some martial artists more vulnerable? Here are some additional insights that are crucial for answering those questions:

1. The more fragile and insecure you are, the more vulnerable you are to choking.
2. Higher confidence lowers the risk of choking.
3. Higher motivation increases the risk of choking.
4. The more you fear choking, the more you will choke.
5. Learning to control the choking response involves a number of acquired toughness skills.

Choking indicates strength in a very real sense. Choking means you're tough enough to face fear head-on and not back out emotionally with tanking or temper. The key point is:

MARTIAL ARTISTS WHO CHOKE BUT STILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT WITH
100 PERCENT EFFORT AND TOTAL POSITIVISM SHOW GREAT TOUGHNESS.

The Challenge Response

When adversity strikes it means no retreating, no whining, no excusing, no raging. Rather than fear and helplessness, what you get is distinct feelings of aggressiveness, spirit, and fight combined with a profound sense of calmness and confidence. Competitive problems become stimulating rather than threatening and a sense of loving the battle gradually takes form.

TO LOVE WINNING IS EASY; TO LOVE THE BATTLE REQUIRES TOUGHNESS.

Responding to crisis, adversity, and pressure with a sense of challenge and love of the battle is neither common nor normal. Instead it is the mark of the winner, the leader, and the champion. Habits of tanking and negativism tragically block the learning process. Only through acquired toughness will this unique and priceless emotional response come within reach.

UNDERSTANDING STRESS AND RECOVERY

Too much stress or too little stress will undermine the toughening process. Getting tougher is fundamentally linked to two specific abilities:

1. Your ability to balance stress and recovery in your training as well as in the broader arena of your life.
2. Your ability to generate as many waves of stress and recovery as possible in the area you wish to toughen.

To fully understand how stress and recovery relate to the toughening process, we need some working definitions. In the Toughness Training context, stress is anything that causes energy to be expended; recovery is anything that causes energy to be re-captured.

Physical stress occurs when you expend energy in moving muscles; mental stress happens when you expend energy in thinking and concentration; emotional stress comes when you expend energy in feeling fear, anger, or other emotions.

Physical stress is engaging in a sparring session; mental stress is thinking about sparring tactics; emotional stress is worrying about how you're going to do during sparring.

Recovery occurs at three levels as well—physical, mental, and emotional. Recovery often simply means rest. When you rest, you temporarily break episodes of stress and allow energy to be re-stored.

Reducing muscle stimulation represents *physical recovery*, breaking concentration and reducing mental stimulation represents *mental recovery*, replacing negative feelings of anger and fear with positive feelings of calmness and confidence represents *emotional recovery*.

Stress and recovery are also closely connected to need fulfillment. Unfulfilled needs represent cycles of stress; fulfillment of those needs is recovery. Likewise, feelings of hunger, tiredness, fear, and depression represent stress; relief from those feelings is recovery.

Balancing your Energy

Expending more energy than you recover has serious consequences. Failure to balance your physical energy leads to muscle failure, exhaustion, and injury. Failure to balance your mental energy affects your focus, concentration, or problem solving. Failure to balance your emotional energy can lead to negativism and burnout. In all three areas, imbalance leads directly to victories by opponents who otherwise would have been defeated. Here are some important stress/recovery insights related to toughening:

1. Stress is anything that causes energy to be expended; it occurs physically, mentally, and emotionally.
2. Recovery is anything that causes energy to be re-captured; it occurs physically, mentally, and emotionally.
3. Unfulfilled needs represent forms of stress. Fulfillment of needs is recovery.
4. In order to fight great battles, your energy deposits should be roughly equal to your energy withdrawals. Your goal should be to enter battle fully recovered whenever possible.
5. Balancing stress and recovery is fundamental to becoming a tough fighter.

Stress and Recovery Examples

In order to balance your energy, it's important that you clearly understand when you are expending energy and when you are recovering it. The chart below lists common examples of various kinds of stress.

Physical Stress	Mental Stress	Emotional Stress
Running	Thinking	Feeling Angry
Hitting	Concentrating	Feeling Fearful
Jumping	Focusing	Feeling Sad
Weight Lifting	Visualizing	Feeling Depressed
Walking	Imaging	Feeling Negative
Moving	Analyzing	Feeling Frustrated
Exercising	Problem-Solving	Feeling Hurt

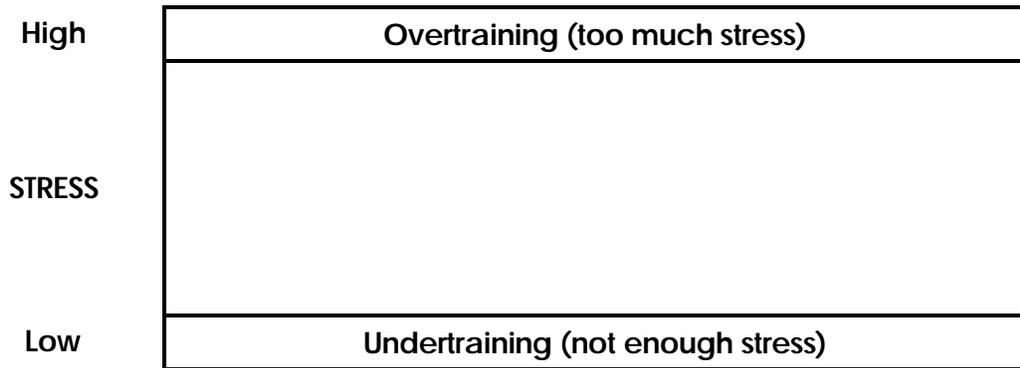
The following below lists common examples of recovery:

Physical Recovery Feelings of bodily relief	Mental Recovery Feelings of mental relief	Emotional Recovery Feelings of emotional relief
Eating	Increasing calmness	Increasing positive feelings
Drinking	Increasing sense of slowing down mentally	Decreasing fear and anger
Sleeping	Increasing fantasy	Increasing fun and enjoyment
Napping	Decreasing focus	Increasing feelings of safety and security
Heart rate slowing down	Increasing creativity	Increasing feelings of self-esteem
Breathing rate slowing down	Increasing spontaneous imagery	Increasing feelings of personal fulfillment

Learn to recognize when you are experiencing stress as opposed to recovery. We tend to think of physical stress as being unmistakable, as in punching a heavy bag for three minutes. Mental and emotional stress can be somewhat more subtle, as when you can't doze off while trying to take a needed nap because you're worried that you might be embarrassed during tomorrow's sparring session. Being able to distinguish between stress and recovery is extremely important. Martial artists have little chance of finding and maintaining stress/recovery balance without such understanding.

OVERTRAINING AND UNDERTRAINING

Overtraining occurs when the volume of stress—physical, mental, or emotional—exceeds the limit of what you can handle. That limit is called your **adaptation threshold**. Undertraining occurs when the volume of stress is insufficient for the desired adaptation to take place. As seen in the figure below, overtraining is too much stress on one extreme and undertraining is too little stress on the other. Both are conditions of imbalance and have distinct performance consequences.



Another way of conceptualizing overtraining and undertraining is in terms of recovery. Undertraining is too much recovery and overtraining is too little recovery.

Consequences of imbalance

Too much stress leads to overtraining and too much recovery leads to undertraining. It's critical that you recognize and understand the body's messages of over- and undertraining. The body is always talking through feelings and emotions. Martial Artists who wish to move to the next level of toughness—physically, mentally, or emotionally—must expose themselves to additional stress. Understanding the body's language of stress and recovery is fundamental to positive growth. Here are some common signals of over-and undertraining:

Physical	Mental	Emotional
Chronic fatigue	Confused thinking	Boredom
Muscle soreness	Poor concentration	Depression
Injuries	Persistent mental mistakes	Sadness
Constant illness	Chronic mental fatigue	Low motivation
Aches and pains	Irrational thinking	Anger
Eating problems	Poor problem-solving	moodiness
Sleeping problems	Negative thinking	Anxiety
Weight problems	Nervousness	Lack of enjoyment

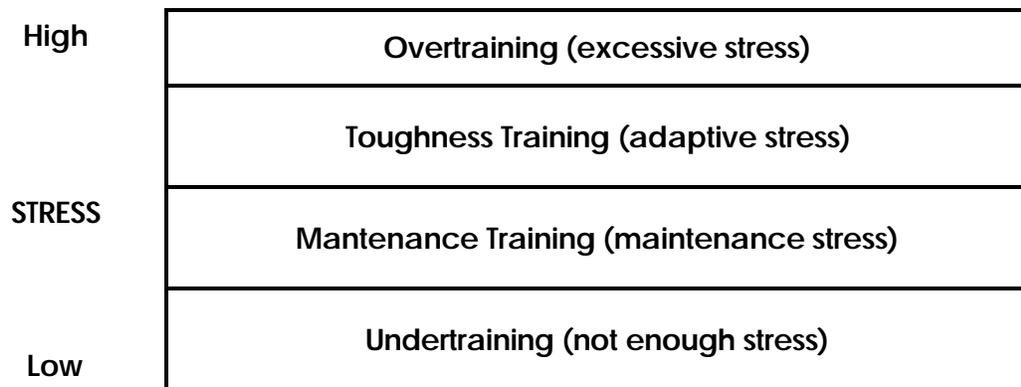
Perhaps the two most important consequences of overtraining and undertraining are that (1) you typically perform well below your potential, and (2) rather than getting tougher, you get progressively weaker. Both undertraining and overtraining result in decreasing toughness. You should also understand:

1. Excessive physical stress will lead to mental and emotional problems.
2. Excessive emotional stress will lead to mental and physical problems.
3. Low motivation, low energy, and fatigue often reflect the body's way of protecting itself against further overtraining (over-stimulation)
4. Depression, moodiness, and negative emotion serve the same purpose as physical pain.
5. Persistent problems with concentration, negative thinking, and nervousness often reflect stress/recovery problems.
6. Sleeping and eating problems are common consequences of overtraining.

Stress that Toughens

You now understand that too much stress or too much recovery will lead to progressive weakening. You also know that physical, mental, or emotional pain is the language of over- and undertraining. The question now is, how can you distinguish between stress that toughens and stress that weakens? To answer this you need to look at the issue of stress a little more closely.

As seen in the diagram, the volume of stress can be divided into four categories relative to toughening:



1. **Undertraining**—too little stress
2. **Overtraining**—too much stress
3. **Maintenance Training**—too little stress (at this level of stress you will simply maintain your current level of toughness)
4. **Toughness Training**—the volume of stress that leads to toughening (this is called adaptive stress)

It's important to understand that only one relatively narrow band of training stress among the four categories leads to toughening. One of the four merely allows you to hold on to your present level of toughness; the other two result in weakening. So, the critical question is how can you tell if the training stress you're experiencing—physically, mentally, or emotionally—is adaptive and therefore toughening, or not? The diagram below provides the answer.

STRESS	High	Overtraining (pain)
		Toughness Training (discomfort)
		Maintenance Training (no pain)
	Low	Undertraining (pain)

The key is in the distinction between pain and discomfort. To toughen you have to go beyond your normal limits, beyond your realm of comfort. When you simply do what is comfortable in your training you're either getting weaker or maintaining your current toughness level. You clearly have to challenge yourself beyond your normal limits to grow. While you have to cross new frontiers, you must not venture out too far or overtraining will result. There's always discomfort because it's further than you've gone before. The point is simply this:

NO DISCOMFORT—NO TOUGHENING
 NO PUSHING—NO TOUGHENING
 NO PERSONAL CONFRONTATION—NO TOUGHENING

The objective is to deliberately seek out new challenges in your areas of greatest weakness. Deliberately seeking out stress and pushing yourself to new limits and new frontiers is *active toughening*. Using the uninvited, random challenging stresses of everyday life to toughen yourself is *passive toughening*. In either case, discomfort indicates adaptive stress.

Stress creates the conditions for growth; recovery is when you grow. Entering the narrow band of toughening stress also creates some stress/recovery imbalance. A short-term imbalance is necessary for toughening to occur. Persistent, chronic imbalance always results in overtraining and progressive weakening.

The no-pain, no gain nonsense

The "no pain, no gain" ethic is tragically misunderstood and misguided. Pain should be immediately recognized and understood by martial artists, be it physical, mental, or emotional.

PAIN IS A SIGNAL TO STOP.
 DISCOMFORT IS A SIGNAL TO PAY ATTENTION

Understanding the way pain is communicated and the way it differs from the discomfort of toughening is vital. That's precisely why martial artists must be tuned in to their bodies, their mental states, and their feelings and emotions. And the better-trained and more finely tuned the fighter, the more important it is to accurately decipher the body's stress/recovery messages. Know your markers of overtraining. Know what is too much and learn to say no when you've reached it. Also learn to recognize and tolerate the discomfort associated with—and essential to—toughening stress.

Highly experienced martial artists learn to tolerate a high degree of discomfort and generally understand when real pain starts and the normal grind of toughening stress ends. What is pain to one person may be discomfort to another. The critical factor is that you know your body and fully understand and remain sensitive to the stress/recovery messages it is sending.

Where is the IPS?

The question where your Ideal Performance State is on the continuum of stress is an important one. Let's go back to the way you feel when you're performing at your absolute peak. Do you feel pain? Absolutely not. Do you feel discomfort? Not really. When they are "zoning," fighters usually report feelings of effortlessness, challenge, and fun. They do not feel pushed beyond their normal limits even though they may be performing well beyond normal levels. Based on peak performance reports, IPS occurs toward the upper range of maintenance stress.

STRESS	High	Overtraining (pain)
		Toughness Training (discomfort)
		IPS (challenge, fun, high performance)
		Maintenance Training (normal signals of stress)
	Low	Undertraining (pain)

Summary

Without stress you simply cannot achieve your goals as a martial artist. Finding the balance between too much and not enough stress is a constant, must-win battle if you are to reach your full potential. Learning to distinguish stress that toughens, referred to as adaptive stress, from stress that weakens is a critical training skill. The meaning of pain, the role of discomfort, and the importance of fun represent serious training considerations. To no-pain, no-gain rule of thumb has no place in the context of responsible training. To toughen you must break new barriers, but pain simply signals you've gone too far. Avoiding the consequences of overtraining and undertraining not only is a journey without end, it's one of the greatest challenges of the martial arts.

TRAINING RECOVERY

Skillfully administering controlled doses of training stress leads to improvement and growth—to become faster, stronger, or more efficient. However, the concept of training recovery is new for most martial artists.

No Recovery—No Growth

Without recovery, stress is all there is. Stress becomes linear—constant and unremitting. Linear stress eventually means overtraining, increasing weakness, and poor performance. In a real sense, recovery is the foundation of toughness. The figure below depicts the fundamental role of recovery in the toughening process.



It's important to understand that only rarely does the volume of stress defeat us; far more often the agent of defeat is insufficient capacity for recovery after the stress. Great stress simply requires great recovery. Your goal in toughness, therefore, is to be able to spike powerful waves of stress followed by equally powerful troughs of recovery. So here is an essential Toughness Training Principle:

WORK HARD—RECOVER EQUALLY HARD

From a training perspective then, training recovery should receive as much training attention as training stress. Unfortunately this is rarely the case.

The Mechanisms of Recovery

Let's review what recovery means. At the most basic level, recovery is simply anything that causes energy to be recaptured. Because the body expresses its recovery need through feelings and emotions—for example, “I feel hungry,” “I feel tired,”—it is vital to respond to feelings.

In fact, the fulfillment of felt needs represents recovery. It's essential also to understand that recovery occurs in three areas—physical, mental, and emotional—just like stress. Recovery is also the period in which growth and healing occur.

The first step in training recovery is learning to recognize when recovery is occurring. The most common signs of physical recovery are reduced feelings of hunger, thirst, sleepiness, and tension; a slower heart and breathing rates; decreases in blood pressure, muscular tension, and brain wave activity. The most common signs of emotional recovery are feelings of emotional relief; increased positive feelings of joy, fun, humor, and happiness; decreased negative feelings of anger, fear, and frustration; increased feelings of self-esteem and personal fulfillment. The most common signs of mental recovery are feelings of mental relief; increased feelings of calmness; and a sense of mental relaxation.

The mechanisms of recovery are divided into four categories:

1. Sleep/Naps
2. Diet
3. Active and Passive Rest
4. Seizing recovery opportunities

1. Sleep/Naps

Along with food and water intake, sleep ranks highest in terms of recovery activities. Poor sleep habits can completely undermine the toughening process. Both too much sleep (excessive recovery) and not enough sleep (insufficient recovery) are problematic. Here are the most important Toughness Training recommendations concerning sleep and naps:

- Get between eight to ten hours of sleep every night.
- Go to bed and get up within thirty minutes of your normal sleep times daily.
- Attempt to go to bed early and get up early whenever possible.
- Learn to take short naps (ten to fifteen minutes) and wake up feeling completely energized and refreshed.
- Keep a daily record of the quantity and quality of your sleep, particularly during periods of high stress.

2. Diet

Consuming adequate amounts of water and nutritious food is a recovery activity of the highest priority. When nutrition and hydration needs are not met, all stress eventually becomes excessive and all other recovery mechanisms that are fundamental to growth fail. Here are the most important Toughness Training recommendations concerning intake of food and water:

- Follow a consistent schedule of eating and drinking.
- Always consume a nourishing breakfast.
- Eat and drink every two hours whenever possible.
- Consume four to six meals per day, but eat lightly. Frequent small meals increase your metabolism and helps to stabilize your blood sugar, giving you more energy over longer periods.
- Eat your last meal rather early in the evening. Meals after eight-thirty are disruptive to sleep.
- Drink a minimum of eight glasses of water per day.
- Eat as wide a variety of foods as possible, with a preference for natural, fresh foods.

3. Active and Passive Rest

The distinction between Active and Passive Rest is based on the fact that recovery from stress can occur both from movement and nonmovement of the physical body. Active Rest involves nonvigorous physical activities that break cycles of physical, emotional, and mental stress. Any activity that involves movement of the body and breaks cycles of mental, physical, or emotional stress represents a form of Active Rest. Examples of Active Rest are walking, stretching, swimming, and hiking.

Passive Rest activities break cycles of stress without involving body movement. Listening to music, playing a musical instrument, or going for a relaxing drive are forms of Passive Rest. Other examples are:

- Laughing
- Watching TV or a movie
- Reading
- Taking an afternoon nap
- Relaxing in a whirlpool

All of these, if done specifically to enhance the recovery process, are forms of recovery training.

4. Seizing Recovery Opportunities

An important aspect of recovery training is working to improve your ability to extract the maximum value from the recovery opportunities that exists while engaged in training, sparring, or combat. Though brief, there are opportunities between skirmishes and clashes that allow you the opportunity to recover.

Planning to better use your down time between training sessions is also very important in the context of recovery training. How you spend your time and with whom can make all the difference in the world in terms of how well you manage periods of intense training stress.

LEARN FROM THE MILITARY

The military has an effective system of toughening an individual. It can take un-disciplined, un-focused, un-brave teenagers and within eight weeks transform most of them into soldiers tough enough to conquer the ultimate fear—the fear of death.

This physical and emotional conversion of fearful adolescents into courageous combat soldiers in so short a time is an astonishing feat, even given the fact that mankind has been perfecting military training methods for five thousand years.

But could the military succeed so well so quickly without using highly skilled and deliberately obnoxious drill instructors to dish out large and carefully orchestrated doses of mental, emotional, and physical stress to recruits? Absolutely not! Without obnoxious drill instructors the military not only would fail to produce reliable soldiers quickly, it wouldn't be able to produce them at all.

In creating the Elite Fighter System of Modern Personal Combat, I believed that by studying the military system, it would yield many important insights regarding personal combat training and toughness training. That assumption proved true, although getting to the useful things required me to brush aside many useless aspects of military life.

Why March?

For thousands of years men marched into battle. Although they're now more likely to ride vehicles into the combat zone, new recruits still spend many hours marching in formation. Why does the practice of marching remain so crucial to the making of a soldier? No one marches on modern battlefields—they run, hide, jump into foxholes, or charge forward. Nobody stays alive very long marching in the face of the enemy. It's clear that in times past when soldiers still marched into battle, that's not what they did during battle. Marching is for between battles.

Clearly this regimented practice of walking in a particular way somehow breeds courage, confidence, and decisiveness during battle. Let's examine the practice more closely.

First of all, how do marching soldiers look on the outside? You never see any visible sign of weakness. No visible fatigue, no sagging shoulders, no negativism, no fear. What you see is total focus, confidence, positive energy, and precision. Every movement is decisive and clean, nothing sloppy or lazy. Every breath is synchronized to exact movement.

Marching prepares soldiers for battle by giving them practice in being decisive, and in looking strong and confident regardless of how they feel. It trains discipline, sustained concentration, decisiveness, and poise, all essential elements in conquering fear.

The Gladiator Walk

All Elite Fighters have the same walk between their training and sparring sessions. Elite Fighters show the same focus, confidence, energy, and precision that soldiers do when they walk. No weakness, nothing sloppy, nothing but strength. This is called the Gladiator Walk.

Practice looking and acting the way you want to feel in your training sessions. Doing that pays off in terms of victory in combat.

The Art of Soldier-Making

The transition from fearful adolescent to fearless—or at least enormously more confident—warrior occurs in response to the following requirements:

1. A strict code of acting and behaving under stress. This includes:
 - A disciplined way of responding to stress.
 - A precise way of walking—head and shoulders erect, chin up, chest out.
 - Quick and decisive response to commands—no hesitation tolerated.
2. No visible sign allowed of weakness or negative emotion of any kind in response to stress. The expression of negative emotion is simply not permitted.
3. Regular exposure to high levels of mental, emotional, and physical training stress to accelerate the toughening process.
4. Precise control and regulation of cycles of sleep, eating, drinking, and rest.
5. A rigorous physical fitness program. This essential component of the toughening process involves two elements:
 - Aerobic and Anaerobic training.
 - Strength Training
6. An enforced schedule of trained recovery. This includes:
 - Regularly scheduled R&R.
 - Enforced cycles of stress followed by enforced cycles of recovery.

Undesirable Features of the Military Training System

In studying military training methods, these are some feature that are inappropriate outside of non-military life:

1. **The stripping of personal identity** and its replacement by group identity are not appropriate to non-military life. Where this does happen—primarily in gangs and cults—it indicates seriously low levels of self-esteem.
2. **Military values, skills, and beliefs** have little application to civilian life. Many, though not all, of the military skills (for example, close-order drill and use of heavy weapons) have no value except in a military career.
3. **Blind adherence to authority** is rarely appropriate outside the military. Decisions in the military are made by next higher command, not by the individual. When you are faced with a life or death situation, you must make the decisions.
4. **The mental and emotional inflexibility and rigidity** often associated with the military mind would severely limit the careers of martial artists who must cope with the subtleties and swift changes of civilian life.
5. **Acquired dislike of physical exercise** is a common result of the pain and boredom of basic training. Although this blind reaction robs some people of all desire to remain physically fit, many others find that military service sets a pattern of fitness that they maintain throughout their lives.

The Role of the Obnoxious Drill Instructor

The Drill Instructor serves as a powerful mental and emotional stressor. Remember, no stress, no growth. As long as the recruits fight the DI, as long as they get their feelings hurt, feel insulted, abused, afraid, and angry, they confirm that they are not yet tough enough. Only when they can remain calm, fearless, and unruffled by the DI's obnoxious treatment have the toughening adaptations taken place.

Experienced DI's get very skillful at detecting weakness in recruits, and their response is always the same—apply more stress, not less. Protecting weaker recruits from stress is the last thing an experienced DI would do. Accelerating the toughening process in the military always involves exposure to increased stress followed by enforced recovery.

One of the most important criteria for entry into elite training units such as the Rangers, SEALs, and Green Berets is the capacity to manage high volumes of physical, mental, and emotional stress. The more elite the training corps, the greater the exposure to training stress.

It's unfortunate in the martial arts when trainers and instructors decide to become obnoxious DI's to hasten the toughening process. It is particularly tragic for young martial artists. The screaming, yelling, threats, and punishment will lead to many accelerated adaptations, but at a very heavy price—the steady undermining of the martial artists love for the art. Once that love is killed off, or even seriously injured, the game is over—maybe for a lifetime.

A note here for those martial artists who must face misguided instructors who—for whatever reason—elect to assume the obnoxious DI role. If you're in this situation, without being aware of what's happening you suddenly awaken to the reality that your interest has died, your motivation is gone, your drive has vanished. In such situations, you have to protect your passion and love for the martial arts. Never allow any instructor to dampen your spirit. View the misguided instructor as an opportunity to accelerate your toughness and prevent his treatment of you from eroding your passion and devotion to the martial arts. Always seek a trained and qualified martial arts instructor.

GETTING TOUGH PHYSICALLY

This section will deal with outside-in training, meaning from outside the body inward toward the emotional chemistry. As you'll see in this section, physical toughening means three things:

1. Improving your physical fitness
2. Looking and acting tougher on the outside
3. Being well recovered physically before going into battle

1. Improving Your Physical Fitness

Whether the battle is intense or mild, competing in any arena—physical, mental, or emotional—requires energy. When the energy is gone, the fight is all but over.

Great martial art instructors have always understood the connection between fitness and confidence, and between fitness and the ability to hold up under pressure. So have the military, police forces, and the FBI. Fitness is simply a measure of your capacity for energy expenditure, for accepting stress. The fitter you are as a martial artist, the greater has been your exposure to physical stress. That means you can take physical hits and keep going. You won't buckle as soon as you are physically pushed.

Being more physically fit also means you'll have more energy to fight mental and emotional battles. Becoming physically stronger and more responsive deepens your belief in yourself as well. You become confident that you can go the distance; you simply refuse to surrender. You truly start believing that you can turn things around, that you can handle anything your opponent throws at you.

ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING IPS CONTROL IS
FOR MARTIAL ARTISTS TO EXPOSE THEMSELVES TO INCREASED PHYSICAL STRESS.

When done properly, greater exposure to physical stress will always lead to greater emotional toughness. For some martial artists, braining their fitness to a new level automatically lead to important psychological breakthroughs. Based on my many years of martial art training and teaching, here are the physical fitness priorities I recommend to you:

Priority 1—Expose yourself to abdominal stress—This may come as quite a surprise, but your abdominals and obliques (the muscles on the side of your lower abdominals) represents the core of all strength. Weak abdominals and poor fitness go hand in hand. Problems with movement, low-back pain, poor posture, and faulty breathing can be linked to abdominal weakness. Weak abdominals predispose you to injury and undermine the entire physical toughening process.

Priority 2—Expose yourself to heart and lung stress—Your heart and lungs must be sufficiently challenged to meet your physical, mental, and emotional energy needs for however long or hard the battle might be. Increased heart and lung fitness can be accomplished via any number of exercise routines using the large muscles of the upper and lower body. Examples are running, cycling, swimming, sparring, and heavy bag workouts.

Priority 3—Expose yourself to overall muscular stress—Regular overloading your muscles with stress to increase overall strength is a must. The ability to generate and resist force is a major component of toughness. Weight machines, free weights, swimming and other types of resistance training equipment can be used to achieve greater total body strength. Being physically stronger automatically translates into more IPS control.

Priority 4—Expose areas prone to injury to progressively increasing stress—Just as we break under pressure at our weakest points emotionally, the same thing happens to us physically. How many times have you been forced out of training because the same weak ankle, knee, or back pain let you down again? How much confidence can you have when the threat of your knee's or ankle's breaking down hangs over you?

When a martial artist has a physical weakness that is prone to injury, the natural instinct is to protect it. Since the weaker knee can't take as much stress as the healthy one, the impulse is simply not to push the weakened knee as much. That's precisely why the weak knee eventually breaks down again. The key to rebuilding confidence in that knee or ankle always is the same two-step procedure:

1. Protect the injured limb, tendon, or joint from stress immediately following breakdown.
2. Expose the injured area to progressively increasing stress as soon as the injury has stabilized.

Another tragic mistake made by martial artists after serious injury or surgery is to stop doing their rehabilitation exercises as soon as the injured knee or ankle is as strong as the healthy one. The injured limb should be taken to a much higher level of fitness than the healthy one. That obviously means more exposure to stress.

Priority 5—Expose muscles to the stress of daily stretching—Injuries can have a devastating effect on confidence. Muscle flexibility plays a critical role in any injury prevention program.

2. Looking and acting tougher

Tougher physically also means better acting with the body. Because the connection between the way you feel and the way you act is so powerful, the following is often referred to as the First Rule of Toughness:

PROJECT ON THE OUTSIDE THE WAY YOU WANT TO FEEL ON THE INSIDE

It's very important to understand the communication process between emotions and the muscles of your body. When you're angry, sad, or fearful the muscles of your face, shoulders, arms, and legs become stimulated in emotion-specific ways. You immediately start looking the way you feel: angry, sad, or afraid. Unless, of course, you are an Elite Fighter. Elite Fighters have learned to reverse the stimulation process. To achieve this feat, which is essential to success, they use the same transmission channels that consistent losers use. However, rather than allowing their emotions to stimulate their muscles in the losing way, they use their muscles to stimulate the emotions they want to feel in the winning way. The key can be stated in just nine words:

THE LINK BETWEEN EMOTIONS AND MUSCLES RUNS BOTH WAYS

Here are some critical truths that you, as a martial artist seeking to improve your skills, should carve into your consciousness so deeply you'll never forget to apply them in every training session:

1. The way you walk, the way you carry your head and shoulders, and the expressions flowing across your face stimulate targeted IPS emotions. Simply moving your facial muscles from helplessness to fight, or from anger to fun, can be enough to give your blood chemistry a generous boost in those winning directions.
2. Acting as if you feel a particular way stimulates emotion-specific changes in your body.
3. What begins as a faked emotion can quickly lead to genuine emotion.

Developing a strict code for the way you act and look in training and combat gives you a powerful tool for controlling the feelings that lock out your talent and skill—feelings like fear, frustration, anger, and despair. Remember, looking the way you feel enhances your current feeling. If you don't like your current emotional state, change the way you look.

3. Being Fully Recovered Before Battle

The third arm of physical toughness is to enter battle fully recovered. The main point is:

NO MATTER HOW TALENTED, SKILLED, PHYSICALLY FIT, OR MENTALLY TOUGH YOU ARE,
IF YOU ARE NOT RECOVERED SUFFICIENTLY TO SUSTAIN THE ENERGY
DEMANDS THAT YOU FACE, IT'S OVER.

When glycogen (stored sugar) has been completely used up in your muscles, they can no longer properly contract and expend energy. When blood sugar falls below a certain point in your brain, precise concentration and clear thinking are not possible. Here are three essential guidelines to follow:

1. **Choose your recovery habits with care**—Undisciplined martial artists who don't follow sensible rules regarding sleep, diet, and rest are the most likely to crack under pressure. In other words, they collapse first. In the long run, undisciplined martial artists always lose to disciplined martial artists of the same ability.
2. **Recover before your next training session**—Before taking on another dose of training stress, make every effort to be physically, mentally, and emotionally recovered.
3. **Defend yourself against low blood sugar**—Guard against letting your blood sugar bottom out during training. Remember to eat often and lightly.

There is more to being an Elite Fighter than merely being mentally tough. That's only half the battle. Being physically fit and entering the battle fully recovered represent the other half. It's vital for martial artists to understand how everything is interconnected. Sleep, diet, fitness, free time, and emotional toughness are all interrelated. Physical toughening, referred to as outside-in training, is an indispensable component of enduring competitive stress.

GETTING TOUGH MENTALLY

Ideal Performance State control can be acquired in two ways. The first is by getting tougher physically through more outside-in training. The second way can be acquired by getting tougher mentally. The connection between thoughts and emotions is very real. Getting tougher mentally means more inside-out training. It calls for learning when, how, and what to think and visualize before, during, and after training to get the desired effect emotionally. Being tough mentally means that you have acquired skills in thinking, believing, and visualization that enable you to:

- Readily access empowering emotions during training and combat.
- Quickly change from a negative emotional state to a positive one.
- Cope emotionally with mistakes and failures.
- Trigger an Ideal Performance State at will.
- Cope with crisis and adversity.

Mental toughness means that under the pressure of combat you can continue to think constructively, nondefensively, positively, and realistically—and do it with calm clarity.

Strategies for Getting Tougher Mentally

Helping martial artists become stronger, more resilient, more flexible, and more responsive mentally has always been the greatest challenge in teaching. Both instructors and martial artists have found the paths to better mechanics or better fitness far easier to follow than the path to training mental skills. Here are strategies for getting tougher mentally:

1. **Change your thinking to change how you feel**—The connection between thought and emotions works both ways: the way you're feeling affects the way you're thinking; the way you're thinking affects the way you're feeling. The important element here is that you can exercise substantial control over the direction and content of your thoughts. That's precisely why great martial artists are always disciplined thinkers. Sloppy, careless, negative thinking completely undermines IPS control. Mentally tough martial artists have learned to reverse the forces of negative emotion through tough thinking. Overriding the temptation to think negatively because that's how you feel is no easy task. That's precisely why so many martial artists fail to reach their full potential.
2. **If You Don't Like the Feeling, Change the Picture**—Images are more powerful triggers of emotion than words. That's how actors and actresses are trained to perform emotionally. They are taught to skillfully use emotionally charged images to access the targeted emotions. Tough martial artists do the same thing. They consistently use images of success, of fighting back, of having fun, of staying relaxed, of being strong in the face of adversity, to move their chemistry in those directions. However, if you expect to change fear into challenge, or disappointment into determined hope, practice is essential. The most powerful and important image you carry in your arsenal is your self-image. Work daily to make it strong, vivid, and courageous—and that's exactly what you'll get back in return.

- 3. Take Full Responsibility For What and How You Think**—You've learned that negative feelings often serve the vital purpose of signaling important unmet needs of various kinds. You've also learned that negative feelings have no place in the Ideal Performance State. Do you go with the negative feelings and search for unmet needs, or do you block the negativism and go with IPS? The solution is fundamentally this:

MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO SUPPRESS NEGATIVE FEELINGS DURING
TRAINING AND COMBAT UNLESS YOU CAN DO SOMETHING
POSITIVE RIGHT AWAY TO MEET THE EXPRESSED NEED.

One of the most powerful things you can do to suppress negative thoughts and feelings is to say "Stop" to yourself and immediately begin processing positive thoughts and images. Put your heart into not allowing negative feelings to lead you into negative thinking.

You aren't always responsible for negative feelings, but you **are** always completely responsible for any negative thinking you permit. After all, nobody but you is inside your head.

- 4. Constantly Practice Positive Thinking**—Positive thinking and positive imagery skills are acquired in the same way motor skills are—through repetition. Sloppy, undisciplined motor movements lead to bad mechanical habits. The same principle holds true for sloppy, undisciplined thinking. Lazy, negative thinking in practice will come back to haunt you in combat the same way sloppy mechanics will. You've got to practice the right mental habits to be strong enough to hold up under the pressure and frustration of competition. That's exactly what being tough-minded means—you continue to think positively and constructively during the toughest of times.
- 5. Never Think or Say Can't; Never Think or Say Hate**—"*I can't handle it. I can't stand it. I can't believe it. I can't do it. I can't make it...I hate myself. I hate my opponent. I hate his place. I hate my instructor. I hate mistakes.*" These are all examples of nontough thinking. They rapidly build emotional roadblocks. This type of inflexible, rigid thinking always leads to problems.

- 6. Think—Visualize in Vivid Emotional Terms—These Thoughts Daily:**

"I will put myself on the line every day."

"I will not surrender."

"I will not turn against myself during tough times."

"I will come totally prepared to train every day."

"I will not show weakness on the outside."

- 7. Think Humorously to Break Up Negative Emotions**—When you think nutty, goofy, silly, funny, off-the-wall thoughts, fear and anger vaporize. When you are overly aroused with emotion, internal laughter puts you back in control.

- 8. Think More Energetically**—Energy is everything, and attaining a high level of positive energy is the key to success. Get more positive emotion flowing during training by thinking more energetically. Think “fun” and more positive energy will start flowing immediately. Think or say out loud:

“I love it!”

“Yes!”

“Is this great pressure or what?”

- 9. Learn to Keep a Here-And-Now Focus during training and combat**—Here’s one of the greatest secrets of peak performance in combat: sustaining a here-and-now mental focus during training makes the natural expression of talent and skill far easier. A present-centered focus, particularly during critical moments of execution, is fundamental to performing well under pressure. During battle, thinking about the future lets fear beat you; thinking about the past lets anger and frustration beat you. Practice maintaining a moment-by-moment focus during training and combat.

- 10. During critical moments of execution, focus your attention outside yourself**—Choking often occurs because too much attention is focused inward. Being aware is one thing—being self-conscious is quite another. The more you can get “outside your head” and completely absorbed in the activity itself, the better you will typically perform. Focusing on a precise target just before critical execution brings a narrow, external concentration that enhances performance for most martial artists. Again, considerable practice is needed to control attention when things get rough. Emotion and attention are powerfully connected. Negative emotions lead to arousal problems and arousal problems lead to attention problems. Learning to direct your attention to the right targets and away from the wrong ones keeps negative emotions in check and helps you achieve proper arousal.

- 11. Practice strategic visualization constantly**—“See,” “hear,” and “feel” yourself overcome your weaknesses and accomplish important goals. Experience victory and success mentally before you test yourself physically. Use mirrors, photographs, and video replay to strengthen and improve the accuracy of the mental pictures you have of yourself performing. The physical practice of a skill accompanied by appropriate mental practice is far superior to physical practice alone. Visualization works best when you have achieved a deep state of calmness and relaxation. Many short sessions (five to ten minutes) are much better than one or two long sessions.

12. Be more disciplined in the way you think about your mistakes—If you fear mistakes, you will make them. If you fear losing, you will lose. Playing not to lose or not to make mistakes locks you up inside and has tragic performance consequences. How you think about mistakes has a major impact on the emotional state you carry into battle. Here's the winning way to think about mistakes:

“Mistakes are a necessary part of learning. No mistakes—no learning. I’ll make my mistakes fearlessly and aggressively. I’m not playing it safe, holding back or looking for excuses. I’m going for it—I’ll accept whatever happens and move on. I don’t fear mistakes; I learn from them.”

After making a painful mistake, ask yourself three questions and move on:

1. What could I or should I have done differently?
2. What can I learn from this?
3. What can I take away from this that will help me in the future?

Once these questions have been answered, make a conscious decision to let it go!

13. Be clear why it’s important to fight before the battle begins; then make the commitment—Without a clear commitment to fight, you probably won’t. It’s just too painful and requires too much energy. Will you put yourself totally on the line and risk losing—giving everything you have to give?

14. Use Adversity to get stronger—Just like mistakes, the way you think about adversity and crisis largely determines the impact these things will have on you. Every crisis is an opportunity to grow, to reach further, to extend beyond your normal limits. A major component of emotional toughness is learning the right attitudes regarding tough times.

15. Constantly remind yourself to love the battle—Love the process, the fight, the marshaling of your resources, the pushing, the falling back, the breakthroughs, the struggles. Loving to win is easy. Loving the process moves you to a whole new level of skill. Loving the battle happens because you make it happen.

16. Just for today—Use the “just for today” approach to changing your habits. Here are some “just for today” resolutions to make to yourself.

“Just for today, I will become challenged when problems come my way. Today I will be a great problem-solver.”

“Just for today, I will love the battle. I can create my own state of enjoyment. No complaining!”

“Just for today, I will exercise, eat, and train right. Self-discipline will bring the confidence I search for.”

"Just for today, I will take charge of how I feel. I am not at the mercy of my emotions."

"Just for today, I will set aside some time to relax and simply let go. Relaxation is an essential part of training."

"Just for today, I will stop saying, 'If I had time.' If I want time, I will take it."

"Just for today, I will find humor in my mistakes. When I can smile at myself, I am in control."

NOWHERE

Nowhere is the mind-body connection more dramatically visible than in the martial arts. Mind, body, spirit, thoughts, feelings, emotions are all part of the same continuum of life. There is and can be no separation.

Nowhere is it more abundantly clear than in the martial arts that everything is interconnected. What you think, how you act, what you eat, how much you sleep, your fighting spirit, your fitness, your passion for life, are all intimately connected.

Nowhere is the need for balancing stress and recovery more evident than in the martial arts. The consequences of overtraining and undertraining are painfully clear.

Nowhere is it more evident than in the martial arts that, in the long run, toughness prevails over talent every time. Victories in any arena in life will be determined far more by spirit and ability to fight than by genetic gifts.

Nowhere is it clearer than in the martial arts that toughness and capacity to fight is formed most powerfully in response to adversity and crisis. It is not the good times, the easy, or fun times that form strength and resiliency in life or martial arts.

Nowhere is it clearer than in the martial arts that every crisis is an opportunity for growth. In life and in sport, stress is the stimulus for growth; during recovery is when you grow. No stress, no growth. No recovery, no growth.

Nowhere is it clearer than in the martial arts that you have to love it. Love the grinding, the searching, the pushing, the pulling, the victories, the lessons, the battle itself. And the crazier it gets, the more you have to love it. Becoming the best fighter you can be means loving to fight more than winning. Becoming the best you can be at anything means loving the journey—from beginning to end.

Nowhere is it clearer than in the martial arts that you must put yourself on the line every day. You must come totally prepared to fight. You must not turn against yourself during tough times. You must never show weakness. Then and only then will your dreams of total victory take form.

Nowhere is it clearer than in the martial arts that the journey into toughness is forever. You never finally arrive, never finally get it, never finally get over the top. You only get stronger or weaker, closer or further away; you only grow or don't grow. The objective is to continue growing, moving forward, challenging yourself to reach beyond and replace weakness with strength.

Nowhere is it clearer than in the martial arts that it's not over till it's over and that you must never, ever surrender.

Begin Your Journey Today!

The Elite Fighter System of Modern Personal Combat is a new and innovative system of martial arts designed to propel the student to unprecedented levels of skill. The student is guided through all levels of personal combat training. Topics include:

- Reactionary Defensive Methods
- Practice Combat Scenarios
- Strategic Offensive Methods
- Geometric Combat Theory
- Immobilizations
- Sector Fighting
- Live Fire Training
- Grappling
- Groundfighting
- Weapons Grappling
- Stick (Baton) Fighting
- Knife Fighting
- Firearms Training

If you have been looking for an effective and proven martial art system designed for today's fighting, then the Elite Fighter System is for you!

Visit www.Elite-Fighters.com and begin your journey today!

Are you ready for the challenge?