Dangers and Deceptions of the Martial Arts?

Why One Woman Walked Away From a Championship Career

By Linda Nathan

Are you wondering if there’s a problem with involvement in the martial arts? You say your neighbor’s little boy is taking a class, and now your son wants to, too? Several women in your office are learning it for self-defense. And, why, even your church has a class! Perhaps you yourself are involved but feel uncertain and want more information. How can anything be wrong?

How can you tell?

This booklet’s aim is to help you understand and decipher the underlying dangers and deceptions of the martial arts. As we present this material, we remember the words of Scripture, which exhort us:

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” (Colossians 2:8)

A True Story –

“Tonie, I don’t get it. How can you be a Christian and teach karate too?”

(Excellent article and testimony from the team at the Lighthouse Trails blog)

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Betty’s words stung, bringing into sharp focus the question Tonie Harris had managed to avoid so far. She knew she had to live her whole life for God—and she wanted to. But, after all, she reasoned for what seemed like the hundredth time, knowing and being able to teach karate was one of her talents, and the Bible says we should use our talents, not bury them, right?

Tonie sighed and put down the book she’d been reading. Her own answers sounded hollow, and Betty’s words wouldn’t go away.

Do you think karate is what God wants you to do? Doesn’t it teach you how to turn your body into a weapon, fill your thoughts and life with violence? Focus you on fear? Reveal a lack of trust?

So she prayed. But when she looked for information, it was sadly lacking.

After rededicating her life to Christ in 1984, Tonie had continued to teach karate for several more years. Now she’d just started co-teaching karate at a Christian high school with another black belt, and she sure didn’t like the implications of her thoughts. Recent memories of her experiences at the school floated up.

She saw kids’ attitudes changing for the worse—bowing to her instead of to God, lured by power instead of by Christ’s love. Some of the kids were bullies, and their parents thought that karate was going to teach them discipline. Instead, it was sowing more violence in their souls. Many were making trouble in the halls, using the things she was teaching them on each other.

But she was a Christian now! She could use her karate to talk to people about the Lord and help them learn self-defense and self-discipline, too. Others were doing it—there was friendship evangelism at karate tournaments, Christian music during kata, and prayer at tournaments. Some Christian ministries incorporated Bible lessons with martial arts training. There were women’s groups and witnessing groups, and online chat groups and bulletin boards, all insisting that a Christian could grow in Christ while practicing karate and the martial arts. Why, there was even a karate ministry at a local Bible school.

Karate was just a tool—wasn’t it? Have you ever wondered about that?

When Tonie first walked into a karate school in 1972, she thought she’d found the answer to her years of childhood sexual abuse, her feelings of failure, and her abusive marriage: Train to fight. Fight to win.

At first, she just wanted to defend herself. But soon it turned into something much more. As she turned herself into a fighting machine, she was on top for the first time in her life.
In her meteoric career, Tonie Harris won 58 trophies in six years, held *Karate Illustrated*’s title of Top Female Karateka in the Pacific Northwest for seven years, and rose to national status. She was in *Who’s Who, Karate Illustrated, Fighting Women News*, and *Black Belt Magazine*. A 1983 book on women in the martial arts devotes a whole chapter to Tonie as one of the eight most accomplished women martial artists of the time. She was sensei—Master.’

But trying to solve her problems with karate left a wake of divorce and broken relationships, six abortions, the blight of lesbianism, and four deeply troubled children. Two became notorious gang leaders. And her plunge into Eastern religious thought and practice opened the door to disastrous spiritual deception.

Thankfully the story doesn’t end there—because the woman who tried to solve her problems with the armor of karate finally put on the armor of God instead. But it didn’t happen in a day, or even in a year. Tonie has had to learn about the real spiritual battle and how to walk in the light with Jesus Christ.

“After I rededicated my life to Christ in 1984, I continued teaching karate for several more years. And, although I’d slowly been becoming aware of its occult roots, it hadn’t seemed important. Until Isaiah 60:1-2 pierced my heart like a sword”:

“For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.” (vs. 2)

“I was a new creation now, in a whole new universe based upon wholly different principles. In His light everything was looking different—even karate.”

Now you may be saying, “But that was just Tonie. She wasn’t really living a Christian life while she practiced karate.” It’s true she wasn’t living a Christian life for many years, but even after becoming a Christian, she tried to walk with the Lord and continue karate, too. That’s when she discovered the answer goes much deeper. For there are vital biblical principles involved that are designed by God to help us walk in a godly manner, to avoid the devil’s snares, and to be protected His way.

From Roots Come Fruits

The martial arts didn’t arise out of a spiritual vacuum. They developed over many centuries, spreading through and acclimating to China, Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. In each culture, they were powerfully shaped by basic premises of Eastern religious thought: Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Hinduism, animism, shamanism, and Zen Buddhism; and many of their techniques and concepts of energy and life still manifest those influences.1

Final Goal: “Enlightenment”

Although some people may use them mainly for sport or self-defense, at their core, the martial arts as traditionally taught embody a holistic view of life whose final goal is the Eastern objective of religious “enlightenment.” Unlike Westerners, Eastern cultures don’t try to separate physical techniques from religion and philosophy. It’s all rolled up into one system. God and energy are one. And in the transition to American soil in the early 1950s, the whole package came together.

Empty Hand, Full Purse

From 1950 on, the popularity of the martial arts exploded. Within twenty years of its release, Bruce Lee’s *Enter the Dragon* grossed 150 million dollars and spearheaded a worldwide martial arts tidal wave to people of almost every culture. By 1993, the martial arts industry as a whole was topping the billion-dollar mark.2 And by 2000, an estimated five million practitioners were busily absorbing the Eastern philosophies of the martial arts.3 The cultural storm has even taken the Christian church. It has been estimated that approximately 20 percent of instructors and 50-70 percent of practitioners call themselves Christians.4 And apparently many don’t see any more problems with it than Tonie did at first. Karate, the “art of the empty hand,” has a full purse.

Fertile Soil in the United States
Why did the martial arts find such fertile soil in the United States? There are six major factors:

**Spiritual Vacuum**—Traditional moral and social structures based on a more biblical view of life continue to crumble as a result of the cultural upheaval of the ’60s and ’70s, creating a tremendous spiritual vacuum and hunger. The martial arts appeared during this rising tide of paganism and period of extreme social vulnerability, and their philosophies promised to fill that hole.

**Drugs**—Psychedelic and other “mind-altering” drugs, visits by Eastern “gurus,” and a massive influx of Eastern thought have opened the way for experimentation with Eastern religions and techniques. With its primarily Taoist and Zen Buddhist foundations, the martial arts movement is a major player in the largest occult revival in history, called the “New Age Movement,” or, in today’s more popular terminology, “interspirituality.”

**Crime**—The rise of immorality, crime, and violence has contributed to personal, family, and community breakdown, unsafe schools and neighborhoods, spiritual emptiness, and feelings of vulnerability and isolation, especially among women and children. Seniors, women, and children are the most frequently attacked people in our society. According to one report, 40 percent of the martial arts market consists of children between seven and fourteen.

**A “god” within**—As faith in an outside creator God, Bible-based meaning and truth, and morality wanes, the search for stability and meaning keeps shifting inward. Eastern religions and personal spiritual disciplines are pouring into that gap. Witness the incredible spread of Yoga and meditation, which actually were created to foster Eastern-style “enlightenment” but are now popular in churches.

**Rebellion**—Those in rebellion and involved in paganism are attempting to throw off a creator God who judges in exchange for a “god within” who doesn’t.

**The Media**—Martial arts may never have achieved such popularity had it not been for their phenomenal growth in the media. “If it were just a matter of sport or fun, I doubt the martial arts would’ve become so popular so quickly,” Tonie says. “People are searching for solutions to more urgent problems, and the arts promise them. The conditions in our culture have been just right for their growth.” She should know; she rode in on that wave.

**What Are “The Martial Arts” Anyway?**

Achieve total self-confidence and inner harmony; develop supernatural powers and wisdom; hone your ability to concentrate on achieving worthwhile goals; find inner peace; and unite the energy of the mind, the body, and the spirit—find and tap the energy of life itself.

The claims for the martial arts are huge and many. Who wouldn’t want to achieve such goals? But what is the basis for these claims anyway? Are they true? Are they truly compatible with biblical Christianity? Can a Christian become more sanctified by the Holy Spirit through these practices? And are they the answer for the true battle? Why be concerned? Aren’t the martial arts just a neutral sport, like skiing or golf?

Well, no.

Although the phrase “martial arts” can refer to all kinds of fighting on many different levels, today it commonly means hand-to-hand fighting systems of Asian origin that merge spiritual and physical dimensions. It’s this integration of the physical and spiritual, based on Eastern religious principles, that leads its practitioners to make such extravagant claims, and wherein the problems lie.

**“Hard vs. Soft”**

Martial arts that are used just for sport or physical discipline are called **hard or external arts**. These include intensive body conditioning, powerful foot and hand strikes, and the use of force (i.e., Kung fu, karate, and judo).

Some people say you can separate these disciplines from the internal or soft arts, which emphasize mystical Taoist and Buddhist concepts. These include spiritual development, balance, form, and seeking control of the so-called chi or Ki force to become attuned with the universe (i.e., t’ai-chi ch’uan and aikido). The Ki concept is
common and central to most Eastern religions and refers to a supposedly impersonal universal “life energy” or force. (More about that later.)

While karate and some of the other martial arts have lost some of their overtly “soft” religious approach in their transition to the United States, this handy division is nevertheless much too simplistic for the actual facts. Elements continually overlap, and such worldview coloring can be very subtle indeed.

Some of karate’s greatest living masters, including Joe Hyams, Herman Kauz, Masutatsu Oyama, George Parulski, Jr., and Yozan Dirk Mosig, all agree that Eastern religious concepts and techniques are key to mastering karate and the martial arts.

Mosig, the influential chair of the regional directors for the U.S. Karate Association (USKA) and an eighth-degree black belt insists that Eastern philosophy should be central to all martial arts instruction. Kauz emphasizes that the martial arts really are training in Eastern meditation.7

The River is Wet

As Tonie discovered, if you set foot in the river, sooner or later you’ll get soaked.

Like some of those masters quoted above I started out just trying to get physical control. My first school even de-emphasized the spiritual aspects, but as I went on I got them anyway. Just because you think you’re avoiding the mental and spiritual aspects of the martial arts doesn’t mean you won’t absorb and be subtly affected anyway.

Bowing, specific methods of concentration, meditation, and breath control, emptying the mind, visualizing yourself doing the kata, calling your teacher “master,” centering in the Ki, and trying to “flow” with the “oneness of nature” and your “inner self” are all part of Buddhist and Taoist philosophy. Doing the arts without absorbing at least some of those influences is like trying to swim in a river and not get wet.

Children are particularly vulnerable to spiritual influences, as Tonie discovered when teaching karate. One California karate teacher has been teaching Yoga, Native Spirituality, and Eastern philosophies to 800 children ages four to eight.8 Adults are often not much more discerning about the subtleties of such influences.

“Christian parents,” says Tonie, “why place your children in a pagan system that teaches them to kill? Why put dirty rags on your kids? All the things advocated by the martial arts schools can only be found in Christ: discipline [Hebrews 12:1-13; 2 Timothy 1:7] family togetherness, peace [John 14:27; Romans 5:1; 8:6], power [2 Timothy 1:7; Ephesians 1:19], self-control [Galatians 5:23; 1 Peter 1:13], all the fruits of the Spirit [Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 1:10].

Why be attracted to paganism? Why return to the world to get what’s in Christ? Where your heart is, there your treasure will be” (Luke 12: 30-31, 34).

So What’s Wrong with Eastern Religions?

When you think “martial arts,” what symbol comes to mind? The dragon, of course. It’s painted on studios, it covers clothing, and it’s in countless movie titles. Why is that? What does it mean?

Two Views

The dragon isn’t just an interesting symbol; it represents a deep cultural worldview—a view of God and energy.
Despite the enormous variety of religious ideas in human experience, there are only two basic—and utterly antagonistic—views about the dragon, and they correspond with each view’s approach to salvation and life. Each system has its own unique view of truth, wisdom, energy, love, and harmony with God and the universe, and yet each is at war with the other. To accept one is to reject the other; you cannot serve two masters.

**The Eastern View:** Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism view the serpent-dragon as positive. Although these cultures differ in ways, their view of energy has basic similarities. The dragon represents a supposedly natural force that assisted in the world’s creation and exists “within” each person. Practitioners believe they can release its power (called the inner Kundalini or Ki force) through occult doctrines and techniques, many of which have been incorporated into the martial arts. This is the camp of salvation by works. It is human-centered and draws upon both human and demonic strength for its victory.

**The Biblical View:** The Bible exposes the serpent-dragon as Satan, an evil fallen angel, who deceived the first man and woman into sin and death: “. . . that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.” Salvation through Jesus Christ and walking in the light with Him is the only way of escape. (See Genesis 3:1; Revelation 12; 13:2; 20:2; Ephesians 2:1–9.) This is the camp of the Lord. It is God-centered, fueled by faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. And it offers the only true victory.

**Dangerous Techniques: Body, Breath, and Mind**

The Eastern religious approach dismisses the biblical teachings about the reality of sin, the need for salvation, God’s judgment, and the need for deliverance from a powerful spiritual enemy. Instead, it teaches that there is an impersonal universal psycho-spiritual-physical force within each person (the Ki) that we can manipulate for personal power and wisdom. Such a concept is the heart of witchcraft. To achieve this, practitioners of this view developed occult techniques that also became, over the centuries, incorporated into the martial arts.

**The Ki Force**

It’s often taken for granted that releasing the Ki force refers to some kind of physical centering, like getting comfortable with yourself, but it really refers to a psychic force said to be produced by the interaction of two basic forces that supposedly comprise nature (or the Tao). These two forces, called the yin and the yang (symbolized by a sphere split by a large “S” dividing black from white), supposedly interact back and forth in a wavelike process.

In karate, the interaction of yin and yang is said to occur in attack and defense. Therefore, learning to use the Ki is viewed as very central to achievement in the martial arts. This central assumption of the nature of spiritual power has untold ramifications for the practitioner. And it can best be seen in the three areas of discipline: body, breath, and mind.

**Physical Discipline**

Physical discipline is the first level of training and does not necessarily have to conflict with Christian teaching, although it may. Christians are commanded not to let sin reign in their bodies but to offer them to God. Physical strengthening and self-discipline are useful but not central. And sexuality must be kept within heterosexual marriage. In the East, however, sexuality is seen as a vehicle of sexual energy, and many basic meditations center on bodily sensations alone, especially in the lower abdomen. Many techniques to arouse the Ki come from observing the snake’s writhing, sensuous movements.

Severe problems can arise when Christians are not governed by the Holy Spirit but by doctrines of demons and that demonic power. These include mental derangement, delusion, sinful, immoral behavior, and oppression by evil spirits. At the very least, a Christian cannot fully receive the Holy Spirit’s joy and power. Besides physical discipline, practitioners also seek control of the Ki through breath control and mindlessness.

**Breathing Discipline**

Masutatsu Oyama says, “[K]arate brings spiritual concentration which depends for its life on breathing methods.” Thus, breath control in the martial arts is far more than just a physical discipline. It is an attempt to
master the Ki, to gain immortality, and to control the universe. Sound far-fetched to our Western ears? Consider the philosophy contained in “Star Wars” about the “Force.” It’s exactly the same. Such concepts from Eastern religion saturate our culture.

Mind Discipline: The dangers of mindlessness

The fundamental state of meditative practice is also the prerequisite for mastery in the martial arts—author Peter Payne.11 The technique of suspending judgment and opening one’s mind to everything is extremely widespread today—from occult educational techniques in the public schools to relaxation techniques and New Age channelers. But the goal is the same: to reach an altered state of consciousness.

The Bible, however, teaches that God is not a force to manipulate. It also teaches that God has given us all we need for godliness (2 Peter 1:3) and has instructed us to be sober minded (Titus 2:6), to “receive the word with all readiness of mind” (Acts 17:11), and to walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh (Galatians 5:16; 6:8). And we are to test everything and weigh all against Scripture.

The method of mindlessness is dangerous for several reasons:

1. One of Satan’s great snares is to lure a person into giving up thinking and discerning.
2. The mind will become filled with one thing or another.
3. Trying to “open” one’s mind this way is actually a form of self-hypnosis leading to a passive state that invites domination by other wills and demonic influence—and even possession. The truth is that one must enter the Eastern mystical experience—and obtain so-called control of the Ki—through a dangerous, trance-like state.

Jesus said: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John14:6). The Bible says that Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man. He IS the path to God, and there is no other.

What’s more, Scripture promises us this:

“His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto Life and godliness, through the knowledge (knowing – John 17:) of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (2 Peter 1:3–4)

Therefore, why walk under the dragon’s system?

THE BATTLE For Which The Martial Arts HAVE NO SOLUTION

“I began to realize that ‘putting on the armor of God’ wasn’t such an easy thing,” Tonie says. “Just putting on my karate gear and quoting Ephesians 6 wasn’t going to do it—because first there was a lot of taking off to do! Greed, lust for power, position, and authority. It’s a daily, fierce battle with self, Satan, and the fallen world. It’s the kind of battle karate never prepared me for—the battle that counts the most—for the state of my soul.” It’s the battle that Eastern religion doesn’t deal with—because it can’t. There is no sacrifice for sin, no Christ-centered system of sanctification, no true holiness.

“The martial arts are man-made victory,” Tonie says. “And it’s a miserable failure. With God you work from a different foundation and fight a different battle. You begin with repentance of sin (acknowledging we are sinners who cannot save ourselves and are in need of a Savior) and new birth through faith in Jesus Christ. Then, through the power of the Holy Spirit flows the transformation of mind, emotions, will, and body. It’s just
the opposite of the self-made Eastern method. There’s warfare all right, but it’s with sin, Satan, and a fallen world—and it really can’t be discerned except by God’s light.

“To those Christians who say there’s no problem training in the martial arts if you have the ‘right’ instructor, I say that, even when occult methods aren’t taught directly, enormous changes can take place training under the dragon’s image. Just the sheer hours and hours of repetitious, concentrated kicking, striking, blocking, and focusing upon becoming a powerful killing machine can deceive you into thinking you’re superior—and even godlike—and quench new life in Christ.

There are many powerful, ungodly situations in the martial arts scene. The homosexual lifestyle is popular. You’re all increasing each others’ sin natures. And there’s a terrific war that goes on within yourself to be on top that’s devastating in the end. That’s not what God calls Christians to be.”

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:3–7)

The real question is not: Can I avoid spiritual influences? The real question is: Whose spiritual influences am I going to get?

The Armor of Karate Versus THE ARMOR OF GOD

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:3–5)

“Therefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” (Ephesians 6:11–12)

While it is true that we live in a fallen world full of physical trials and dangers, and there are times when we need to train and defend ourselves on a physical level, obviously wearing the armor of an ungodly world-system is not the answer. This is the real problem with the martial arts: the worldview hidden within it.

“You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it you.” (John 15:16)

“I cried out, ‘Dear God, show me your way!’ And He did.”

Through His Word, we can obtain the wisdom and understanding we need to walk through life with Him:


“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:16-18)

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (2 Corinthians 7:1)

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Romans 12:2)
“Through such verses, I came to see my life and my sins in the light of Jesus’ forgiveness. As I began to weep and call upon that Person Who lived and died for me, I put my complete trust in Him, and He took away my sins and gave me His armor. What a Great Exchange!

“Now I don’t believe we should become pacifists. God forbid Christians should be passive in the face of evil! But we have to use discernment and not the world’s systems to gain victory.”

“Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” (Luke 10:19)

“If we let God teach us to fight His own way and direct us to the battles that He chooses, we’ll grow holier and draw closer to Him, experience more joy and love and peace, and be more able to really help others.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.” (Ephesians 6:10)

“Let’s put on the whole armor of God.”

“Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiter of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. . . . And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” (Revelation 12: 12, 17)

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**DANGERS & DECEPTIONS of The Martial Arts and Why One Woman Walked Away From a Championship Career, [click here.](http://www.masuccess.com/features/barnes.htm)**

**Endnotes:**

4. De Castro, et. al., op., cit., p. 27. The authors of the article obtained this information from a personal interview dated 7-14–93 with Scot Conway, founder of the Christian Martial Arts Foundation.
7. See *The Dark Side of Karate*, pp. 24–26, for full quotes and details.
9. For a complete Worldview Comparison Chart comparing the biblical and Eastern religious worldviews in six different categories (the nature of reality, the problem of evil, the nature of good and evil, the solution to evil, the nature of Jesus Christ, and the view of the serpent/dragon), see *The Dark Side of Karate*, Figure 7.1, p. 48.
10. See Ephesians 2.


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