

MASTERING SELF-DEFENSE

Staying Aware Avoids Problems

by Aimee Hughes



“I began my personal training in the Non-Violent System (NVS) of self-defense with Grandmaster Verkerke in 1996,” says Eddie Rose, senior instructor of NVS Peace in the Midst of Non-Violence at Shangri-La Springs, in Bonita Springs, Florida. This aspect of the martial art form *seicho jutsu* was created by Canadian Daniel Verkerke, Ph.D., as a simple self-defense system to teach and perpetuate nonviolence; he continues to share it with the public,

law enforcement, corporations and private security firms in the U.S. and internationally.

Nonviolent self-defense is akin to the dynamics of bullfighting. “The matador never matches his strength with the enormous animal; rather, he redirects the energy of the bull with simple and precise movements—counterbalancing—and letting the bull’s energy move past him,” explains Rose. He’s trained everyday people of all ages and walks of life in this approach, in the U.S., UK,

Puerto Rico and Jamaica.

“As they train, students begin to feel more secure wherever they go, because they are learning how to be safe even in the midst of physical confrontation,” says Rose. “They wind up feeling more empowered as they learn how to neutralize aggression simply and effectively.”

Practicing NVS increases balance, coordination, overall flexibility and joint mobility. Its soft, circular, martial arts movements, combined with

slow-to-fast linear movements, also enhance cardiovascular health.

“Mental and spiritual training includes the awareness and development of a state of being conscious of energy and mind. Everyone’s actions and reactions directly reflect the development of their mind,” says Rose.

Another nonviolent form of self-defense is *Shaolin* five animal kung fu, a martial arts style that mimics the characteristics of five animals—the tiger, leopard, snake, crane and dragon. Instructor Lloyd Fridenburg owns Fitness with a Purpose, in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, where he emphasizes the awareness and avoidance concept as the psychological heart of nonviolent self-defense.

Fridenburg, founder and senior instructor of the Waterloo Kung Fu Academy, explains, “The concept emphasizes being constantly aware of your surroundings while avoiding obvious areas of potential danger.” He also stresses the importance of proper body language—being able to read that of others, as well as how to diffuse confrontation upfront in how we present ourselves.

“Martial arts are a two-sided coin,” he says. “There’s the martial aspect, which involves techniques that allow

a person to defend him- or herself in a wide range of situations. Then there’s the art aspect, which encompasses a deeper study, encompassing forms of movement and mental, philosophical and meditative techniques.”

“Overall health benefits are no different than one might expect of any disciplined fitness regimen,” notes Fridenburg. “However, the nature of a quality martial arts program forces practitioners to focus their entire attention on what they are doing. The mere act of staying grounded in the present moment dramatically reduces stress and sets martial arts practices apart from many other forms of movement.”

Tai chi, an ancient, softer style of Chinese martial art, leverages relaxation, posture and energy work, rather than muscular tension. As a Taoist art, it embodies the way nature works, using minimal effort to accomplish a lot.

“Demonstrating tai chi as a form of nonviolent self-defense is much easier than describing it,” says Aaron D. Nitzkin, Ph.D., of New Orleans, a Tulane University professor, tai chi master and certified medical qigong instructor. “If someone attacks, you don’t resist; you can

use tai chi principles to yield to their movements with a natural, circular, continuous motion, turning their own force against them. When you move aggressively against a master, it feels like you’ve just bounced off them and fallen down. In order to win at tai chi fighting, you need to remain completely calm and centered and most of all, listen to your opponent’s energy with your hands, so that you can yield to it and then redirect it.” It’s a profound lesson in interpersonal communication.

“My students report stronger immune systems, greater clarity of mind, better sleep, less anxiety and depression, and greater emotional stability,” says Nitzkin. “Practitioners become much more sensitive to and conscious of the internal condition of their bodies, and even develop the ability to feel bioelectric fields.”

Whichever form of nonviolent self-defense suits us, experts advise that students study with a certified and experienced instructor for optimum results and safe practice.

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