

THE MARTIALIST: YEAR FOUR, ISSUE ONE

Martialism Meets Shorthand Empty Hand

By Phil Elmore

Every functional martial art is based on *principles* rather than on the memorization of rote techniques. What this means is that the practitioner – rather than memorizing a complicated decision tree of fixed responses to predicted attacks – *applies* the principles of his or her martial art to a given situation. He responds as appropriate using the tools learned (the actual fighting techniques) in a dynamic, not rote, fashion.



Photo by Phil Elmore

Every viable *philosophy* is composed of principles that can be applied to life, to decisions and choices in life. All goal-directed action involves moral choice; a philosophy is the means through which you make this moral choice, through which you determine *ought* from *is*. A philosophy composed of complex decision trees of fixed responses to given questions would be just as unworkable as a rote martial art so codified. Before the philosopher could take a decision, she would become bogged down in the complex array of choices. Worse, she

might fail to find an answer at all, if the specific decision faced had not been codified previously.

Understanding the principles of a martial system and of a philosophy allows you to apply that system or that philosophy to your life without memorizing a lot of complicated rules, responses, and options. It is much easier to keep in mind a single principle than fifty techniques or a hundred specific scenarios. Compare and contrast the philosophy of martialism with the self-defense system of Shorthand Empty Hand. Take the tenets, the principles, of both and use them to *live your life*. I do this and I recommend that you do, as well. It is a formula for dynamic, assertive, defensive living and survival.

You'll see some overlap. You'll also see some gaps, for a list of fighting techniques is not a universal pattern for how to accomplish the "*what*" comprised by your philosophical tenets. Spend some time mulling over just what these principles mean:

THE PRINCIPLES OF MARTIALISM AS A LIFESTYLE

- You are an end unto yourself. You don't owe anyone *anything* unless you agree to accept that responsibility. Responsibilities are accepted, not imposed.
- No one has the *right* to violate *your* rights. This means no one has the right to harm you physically, steal your property, or abuse you unless you consent to such mistreatment.
- Others' opinions of you do not matter.

THE MARTIALIST: YEAR FOUR, ISSUE ONE

- Be alert. Don't sleepwalk through life or you'll fail to see it when others attempt to violate your rights.
 - Learn to say NO. Refuse. Resist. Stand up for yourself. When someone makes demands you don't wish to meet, you don't have to make excuses or compromises. Simply say NO. The person making demands must cope.
 - Be confident. This will come with time. Once you achieve physical competence in self-defense, you'll find you are naturally more confident. Stand tall. Walk boldly. Move calmly.
 - "Fear never arrives." This quote is from a book called *Street Ninja* by the no-doubt pseudonymous "Dirk Skinner." Either what you fear will never come to pass, or when it does you will be too busy dealing with it to worry over it. Either way, channel your fear into preparation. "Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof," goes another of my favorite sayings.
 - Take action. Do not hesitate – but don't be reckless, either.
- THE PRINCIPLES OF SHORTHAND EMPTY HAND AS A SELF-DEFENSE SYSTEM**

- Stay aware. *Awareness* is the most important component of self-defense. Only when you know what is going on around you can you possibly hope to deal with it.
- Focus on everything and nothing. When you face off with someone, blur or unfocus your vision slightly. This slightly blurred holistic vision helps you perceive movement in the other person and makes it easier for you to dehumanize him.

- Keep your hands up. When approached by someone whom you do not trust, put up your hands and maintain a safe distance. Assert your personal space.
- Maintain space. Asserting and maintaining your personal space establishes a barrier, a physical boundary, between you and the opponent.
- Move forward. Do not give ground if you can help it. You may have to back up at times to take advantage of your footwork, but when you do, follow up by *driving forward* to gain and keep the initiative.
- Lead with the hands and the feet will follow. Use your hands as weapons. Use your feet for mobility and keep it simple, with your feet planted firmly.
- Palm Heel, Edge of Hand, Fist. These are the natural weapons of the hands.
- Face, Neck, Groin, Knees, Ankles. These are the primary targets of *Shorthand Empty Hand*. The face, the neck, the groin, the knees, and the ankles of every human being are equally vulnerable.

Can you see, in looking at those two sets of principles, how you would apply them in concert to live a dynamic, assertive life? You don't have to live your life under fear of constant attack, looking for ninja in the shrubbery and assassination attempts behind every knock at the door... but you *are* under attack. You are under attack every moment in certain very specific ways. The principles I have just shared will help you cope with that attack *and* prepare for the violence that *could* (but usually doesn't) result from those attacks.

THE MARTIALIST: YEAR FOUR, ISSUE ONE

Let me say that once more. I want your full attention. *You are being assaulted.* You are being *intimidated.* You are being *oppressed.* Every day and from every corner of life you are enduring wave after wave of often hostile, sometimes malicious, but always demanding *imposition* on your person. Most of the time you field, absorb, or even repel these attacks without conscious knowledge. They are part of our society and our culture and you probably do not think of them as mental *assaults* – or as situations in which *self-defense* is appropriate.

The fact is, however, that just as you must always be prepared to defend yourself physically in a dangerous world, you must be even *more* prepared to defend your *mind* in a world that hates you. Hatred may seem like a strong word, but how else would you characterize the alignment of countless unrelated forces that all seem to want what you don't want to give? If you cannot stand up to these attacks on your mind, on your person, on your *self*, you will not be able to defend yourself physically when the time comes. If you cannot stand up to them, you cannot be a martialist. Learning the mechanics of self-defense is outside the scope of any single article, but what we *will* discuss is how to lay the mental foundation for self-defense. That is the purpose of martialism and assertive living. It is the ability to defend your mind that makes physical self-defense possible. It is the ability to defend your mind that enables you to live a dynamic life as a martialist, taking action where action is required, defending your person and your sovereignty.

The purpose of martialism, or of martialism combined with Shorthand Empty Hand, is *not* primarily to help you kick ass and take names (though I'd like to think it *will* help in that department). It is to prepare you, to help you, to encourage you, and to enable you to *live*

a better life. The key to living a better life in a society so rife with mental and emotional oppression – the demands and manipulations of advertisers, of media news outlets, of coworkers, of friends, of family, of governments – is to *live assertively.* Assertive living is the lifestyle of the man or woman of *action* – a lifestyle characterized by adherence to a moral code, the willingness to *enforce* that moral code, and a keen awareness of the value of the self. It is the recognition that you are an end unto yourself and thus not defined by others' demands, others' desires, or others' emotions. It is the willingness to set your personal boundaries and stand by them – to stick up for yourself and for others in a firm but reasonable manner, backed by the willingness to use physical force if you must.

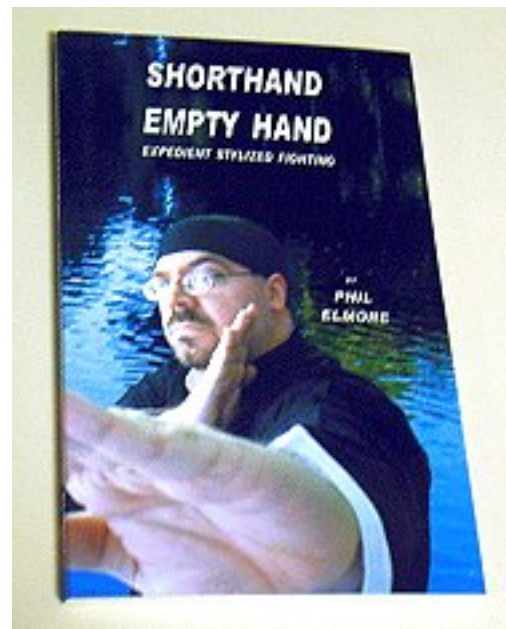


Photo by Phil Elmore

Assertive living is *better* living because the martialist is happier and mentally healthier than his passive brothers and sisters. When you cast off the demands of others and refuse to be intimidated or otherwise pushed around, you value yourself more, you are more satisfied with

THE MARTIALIST: YEAR FOUR, ISSUE ONE

your life, and you are better able to deal with all challenges that come to you. What's more, living as a martialist develops a personal confidence that others perceive. That confidence is both attractive and repellent, for good people value confidence and competence – while bad people fear and avoid it. Let me share a few scenarios with you through the eyes of one who aspires to martialism. All of these are situations I directly witnessed.

I was sitting in a business meeting for a large industrial corporation. Attendees at the meeting were learning to use a complex document control database. Leading the meeting was the individual responsible for that database. His attendees included several people over whom he had no direct authority who clearly thought sitting through the meeting was beneath them. As I watched, a few of these people started playing the part of hecklers, joking and taking snide shots at the meeting leader. He responded with a few muttered comments of his own but, as he is a fairly soft-spoken person, these went unnoticed or were ignored. Before long, he had lost control of the meeting and several people left at the break.

A friend of mine belongs to a church whose members are fairly pushy. They were trying to get her to attend a church event to which she really did not want to go. She lamented this to me. "Just tell them you aren't going," I said. "Don't offer an explanation and don't discuss your reasons. Say simply that you cannot attend." She couldn't bring herself to do this, so I suggested she tell them she could not get a babysitter. "You were just telling me what a hassle it was to find someone to watch your daughter," I said. She leapt at this chance. The next day, however, it turned out that she'd attended the event after all. Some of the helpful folks at the church, including the pastor's

wife, had arranged for child care for her daughter and had called her to *inform* her of the arrangements they'd made without her consent. She ended up going along with it all.

I was sitting in a restaurant with my lovely wife when our waiter, who clearly wasn't too bright, made what he probably thought was an innocent comment (something no experienced waiter would have done, but a blunder a beginner might make). He behaved so rudely, in fact, that it essentially ruined dinner for us. We sat through the meal as I fumed over this callous disregard for people the waiter *should* have been trying to please.

What do these three situations have in common?

Each of these three events represents an attack on the self by outside influences. When people treat you with a lack of respect, they are telling you (verbally or nonverbally) that they do not see you as you would like to be seen. They do not value you as a person because they are willing to violate your rights and your wishes. They do not respect your boundaries, to use a clichéd but very accurate phrase. They are attempting to *impose* on you *their* ideas of your self, of your person, by treating you as they wish to treat you (and not as you wish to be treated). Whether the goal is to diminish you by treating you as less important or unworthy of respect, or simply to get you to comply, to do something you do not wish to do, the result is the same. In each of these three events, martialism and assertive living are necessary if those involved are to continue to live well and to be happy with themselves (and with their ideas of who they are). Martialism requires that we stand up for ourselves in the face of these assaults.

THE MARTIALIST: YEAR FOUR, ISSUE ONE

One of the earliest lessons I learned in the business world (and which I did *not* learn until I'd been a professional writer for several years) was taught to me by a supervisor for whom I have a great deal of respect to this day. I was complaining about how unreasonable a particular schedule seemed. "There's no way I can get this done in this amount of time," I groused. "Phil," my supervisor told me, "you've got to learn to *push back* when you get this. Don't just take it. If it's not reasonable, *make it* reasonable." Not surprisingly, it was this supervisor – a good man and a gifted manager named Paul – who also taught me another valuable lesson. He called it "summoning your inner prick."

"You can't be afraid to be a prick sometimes," Paul explained. "Sometimes that's the only appropriate reaction. When people treat you like shit, summon your inner prick. Don't feel bad about being a jerk to people who treat you that way. They've got it coming. There's no reason to feel guilty about that."

Since then I've learned a lot about when to stand up for myself, when to push back, and – yes – when to be an *absolute prick* because it's necessary and warranted. I've learned not to feel guilty about pissing people off when it was *necessary* to stand up for myself. I am learning how to *be a martialist* – and that's what I'd like to share with you.

In the three situations I described before, martialism could have salvaged each of them. That meeting leader could have stood his ground and informed his hecklers that they would either be quiet and listen or leave the meeting – an assertive stand that would have enforced his demands for respect and professionalism. (He didn't do this and the meeting collapsed as a result.) My church-going friend could have informed

her fellow worshippers that no one makes arrangements for her child without her consent – thus setting a precedent that would have put them on notice for future scenarios. (She didn't and she had to deal with the pushy manipulations of that congregation in the future.)

In the case of my trip to the restaurant, the event happened *after* I started to learn about the need for assertive living. My wife and I finished our meal and I realized that I was *miserable* – that a single stupid comment from someone had ruined what was supposed to be a pleasant trip out. To live assertively, I had to address the situation. Ideally, I should have said something *at the moment the comment was made*, but I was not mentally prepared to do so. In that respect, I failed. Expecting nothing but a pleasant dinner, I was caught emotionally flat-footed by the remark and had to work out in my head what to do about it. This is not right or wrong; it simply was what occurred. I am no expert on how to live your life, but I've come to believe very strongly in the concept of martialism.

The only thing I could do was address the incident after the fact. I walked to the counter where patrons pay their bills. I went alone, telling my wife I would meet her at the door. The waiter who'd made such an ass of himself rang me out and handed me my change, which I pocketed.

"And now," I said, placing my hands on the counter and leaning forward, "A word of advice."

The waiter's eyes grew wide as saucers. I was angry but calm and I'm sure my anger was clear. "I am going to do you a favor," I told him, "and keep my voice down so that none of your other patrons' meals are disturbed by this little scene." I went on to inform him exactly why his comment was inappropriate and why it ruined our meal. He stammered an

THE MARTIALIST: YEAR FOUR, ISSUE ONE

apology – and by this I mean he literally had trouble getting the words out. I warned him never to make the same mistake again and informed him that he had lost repeat business, as we would never return. I then spun on my heel, joined my wife at the exit, and left. I have never gone back.

I want to stress that I did not make a scene. This was between me and the waiter, which is why his other customers never knew it was occurring. This was not about stomping around acting obnoxious or with exaggerated drama. This was about addressing an insult and holding the man accountable for his actions.

Some would say that how we choose to react or how we choose to feel about something like this is up to us. We can choose not to be offended, they counsel. While we certainly could choose to repress our natural reactions to such an insult, martialism is not stoicism and repressing your outrage is not healthy. When someone insults you, the appropriate thing to do is *respond with appropriate assertiveness*. Ideally, you do this immediately. If you fail to do it immediately, you do it remedially.

That is martialism. That is assertive living. Shorthand Empty Hand – physical self-defense skills – backs up these choices, for whenever you assert yourself, you must be prepared for the consequences. That is pushing back when you are pushed. It does not mean behaving like a raving madman, an “ugly American,” or a boorish lout. It does not mean using violence inappropriately or swaggering through life with a chip on your shoulder. It means only preserving your ego, your sense of self, from the attacks of others.

You do this by making it clear in word and deed that you are not someone who will tolerate disrespectful, rude, or otherwise inappropriate behavior. In so doing – in so preserving yourself – you also set the stage for physical self-defense. You make it more likely that you will be prepared mentally for doing what must be done if someone initiates force against you. Your willingness to confront others will translate into a willingness to use force *when appropriate* in self-defense.

You may be thinking that you’ve wasted your time reading this. “I know not to let people treat me like dirt,” you might be thinking. “I’m not a doormat. I don’t need anyone to explain that to me.” What you may not realize is just how accustomed you have become to others’ rudeness and disrespect. Our society has become more coarse than ever before. Ironically, the nastier we get, the less likely we are to stand up to such behavior, to confront it. We complain a lot and we get angry, but generally we *avoid* confrontation. As a result, we don’t stand up for ourselves. Recognizing that I was doing this very thing was the inspiration for this book. It might be more accurate to say that recognizing I had *stopped* doing this prompted me to consider the topic at length.

To live as a martialist is to be *strong* – not necessarily physically, though that never hurts, but mentally and emotionally. A husband who lives that way is a source of strength to his wife. He is assertive on her behalf without being overbearing. He is firm without being unyielding. He is confident without being arrogant. He treats her with respect and acts forcefully and without hesitation when she is treated badly by others. He makes his wife proud for good reason and stands up for her and for himself. He does this because he has the confidence and the wisdom that come with standing up for what is right – and

THE MARTIALIST: YEAR FOUR, ISSUE ONE

that thrive in any individual who is happy and satisfied with his life.

I want you to be a martialist because it will mean living *better*. I want you to combine the principles of martialism and of Shorthand Empty Hand – or of whatever martial art or system you study – as a formula for that better living. I hope, through *The Martialist* and my other work, to share with you what I've learned about such a lifestyle. I want you to see your boundaries in your mind and immediately enforce them when someone violates them. I want you to be able to recognize when you are being treated disrespectfully. I want you to develop the courage and the will to confront such disrespect, rather than avoiding it. In so doing I hope to encourage and reinforce your own journey to better living and, more importantly, better *action*.

The man and woman of action protect those for whom they care while standing up for what is right and upholding a moral code. Doing so produces changes in the behavior of others – some good, and some less than pleasant. I hope to encourage you on this path of self-discovery and self-realization. That is, ultimately, what we're talking about defending – your *self*, your *ego*. This is not self-absorption and it is not pride. It is martialism.

No one, not even me, can *really* teach you to live as a martialist. What I have presented here, however, are the general principles of assertive living, coupled with (in the Shorthand Empty Hand curriculum) the foundations of self-defense necessary in preserving your life. Keep these in mind. Read them every day, if you have to, in order to keep them foremost in your thinking. I publish *The Martialist*, but even I forget these principles and fall into bad habits. The Glorious Path of Least Resistance is, like the dark side of the

Force, remarkably seductive. It's easy to fall into it and difficult to climb out of it.

Principles are just that – *principles*. They're not specific rules and they're not detailed instructions. They're concepts that you must learn to apply. Two people can apply the same principle to the same situation and conclude, quite reasonably, that they must take different actions. Learning to apply martialism comes with practice.

Remember, too, that you cannot afford to make mistakes as you try to get this right. Screw up and hit someone just once when it's not justifiable and you'll be looking at an assault charge. A criminal record's not an easy thing with which to live. A lot of good people who've made isolated mistakes live with those black marks for the rest of their lives.

Living as a martialist is about *liberty*. To be a prepared, assertive citizen is to be free to defend yourself – free to conduct your life as you see fit and to preserve your life in the face of threats to your liberty. This does *not* come without cost. Liberty is a terrible, frightening burden. It requires us to make our own choices. It requires us to succeed or fail on our own merits. It requires us to view our fellow human beings' freedom of action as a benefit, not a threat. Liberty is one of the most frightening gifts anyone can give – and one of the most terrifying rewards any human being can earn. There are those who lack the courage for it. There are those whose cowardice ferments into contempt and hatred for the armed citizen. These are the enemies you will make as a martialist. Prepare yourself to meet them. ♠

For more information on Shorthand Empty Hand, visit the SHEH website online at www.shorthandemptyhand.com. The SHEH text is available through booklocker.com.