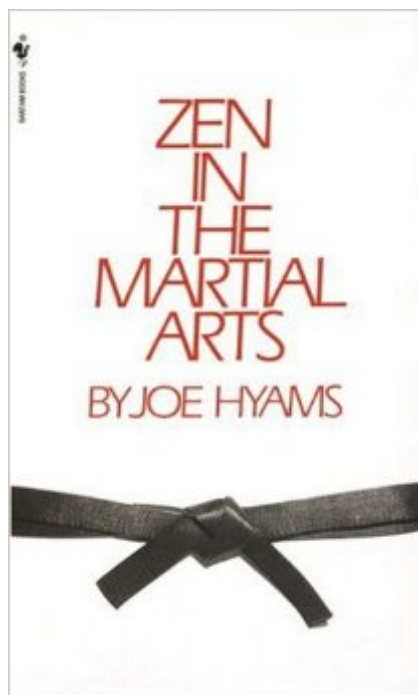


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Zen In The Martial Arts



Synopsis

"A man who has attained mastery of an art reveals it in his every action."--Samurai Maximum. Under the guidance of such celebrated masters as Ed Parker and the immortal Bruce Lee, Joe Hyams vividly recounts his more than 25 years of experience in the martial arts. In his illuminating story, Hyams reveals to you how the daily application of Zen principles not only developed his physical expertise but gave him the mental discipline to control his personal problems-self-image, work pressure, competition. Indeed, mastering the spiritual goals in martial arts can dramatically alter the quality of your life-enriching your relationships with people, as well as helping you make use of all your abilities.

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Customer Reviews

First I'd like to address a couple of criticisms that I read here that this book is rather superficial and doesn't get into Zen concepts in depth. That's true, this book is really only an intro to Zen--if you're already knowledgeable then this book will probably be too basic. However, for the beginner there is no better place to start, and as someone else here observed, the quotes from Bruce Lee are almost worth the price of the book by themselves. Joe Hyams started his karate training back in 1952 with Ed Parker--a full ten years or more before the craze got started in America. He had the opportunity to train with such greats as Bruce Lee, Bong Soo Han, Ed Parker, and Jim Lau from the very beginning. Joe encountered many trials and tribulations, frustrations, and disappointments during his training, but he never gave up. One reason is he often had the opportunity to discuss his

problems with the many great teachers he trained under, and they often offered their wisdom and insights to help him through the difficult times. He took that wealth of personal experience and knowledge and put it all into this little book. Hyams gives a very clear, concise, and easy to understand introduction to Zen in the martial arts. The discussions are often illustrated and liberally peppered with fun anecdotes from his personal experiences with different masters, making this almost a personal journey through the dojos and minds of some of the most famous martial artists of our time. Hyams writes very well (he was a famous Hollywood screenwriter) and so rather than another dry, obscure, Zen philosophy tome, the book sounds more like an intimate conversation with a friend over a glass of wine and dinner. It sounds like he's personally talking right to you. Hyams touches on so many concepts that I won't try to discuss them much here. But I will mention probably the most important one--which is persistence. Hyams points out that it often isn't the most talented and gifted student that achieves the most in the martial arts--since they often quit the first time they encounter a serious difficulty--since they're so used to everything coming so easy. Rather, it's the person who often has very little going for him physically, and has the patience and perseverance to stick it through to the end. I'll mention just one other important principle. This relates to the Zen idea of living in the moment, especially when training, but also in everything else one does in life. Don't allow other concerns, however pressing or important, to weigh on your mind and distract you when you're training. Concentrate on living in the present moment and you'll make the most of your training--and of all the other activities in your life. Someone who's always worried about their other concerns can't truly live in the present, and therefore will never truly enjoy or make the most of whatever activity they're engaged in. Part of their mind is always somewhere else. Strive to always live in the now, in the present moment. Interestingly enough, this idea has been confirmed by modern psychological research. If you have concerns that worry you, don't allow them to bother you to the point where you're thinking about them all the time. The best way to deal with this, it's been found, is to set aside some time each day--they recommend 10, 15, or 20 minutes at most--where, if you need to--go ahead and worry yourself sick about it. Then put it out of your mind and enjoy the rest of your day. Another important thing you can do during this time is to not just worry about everything but to put some constructive thought into how to better deal with your problems. Sometimes you won't have a good idea about how to do that for a while, for days, maybe weeks, but don't let that get you down. Remember the other principle of persistence I mentioned earlier. Stick it through to the end. Realistically, life is never as bad as it seems to us during our darkest and most depressed moments--nor as wonderful as it seems during our happiest, most ecstatic moments. It's somewhere in between. The point here is that one should also cultivate the proper

attitude--since that's often the only thing one has total control over in one's life. If you're the sort of person for whom even little things get you down--which is more of us than we would like to admit--then strive to be more objective. The little things can't really hurt you. They're just annoying psychologically because they bruise our egos a little bit. Save your emotional energy for the really big problems in your life, instead--because there will be more than enough of those. Cultivate a positive, upbeat attitude so that the little things are practically beneath your notice. Let them slide off you like water off a duck's back. This is also another important Zen principle--that too much ego impedes our progress in the martial arts--and our path through life as well. Well, I've gone on longer than I intended, but this book is so chock full of useful little tidbits of advice that I got a little carried away. So I'll just conclude by reiterating that Hyams has written a great little introduction to Zen concepts as applied to the martial arts. But perhaps even more important is that they can be applied beneficially to every other area of your life.

I bought this book as a kid at 16 just being introduced to martial arts. 20 years later, I can still say, after college and an adult life filled to overflow that this book, among the hundreds I have read that touch on similar subjects, is STILL the best book of it's class. It is modern, unlike Sun Tzu or Samurai literature, and that is the book's strength. Samurais did not have the tedium of modern life to contend with: boardroom meetings, petty office jobs that lend life no meaning, mindless commercialized, propagandized media buzzing all around us. Samurai did not live in our world of wasting time and energy on nothing. They had time to get dressed and take their time, breathe clean air, and be human, and that is what Zen in the Martial Arts attempts to do, restore that balance to a martial artist's lifestyle...in a Modern world, however, not in some remote past. And that is why this book is in a class of it's own. Many try to approach this focal point without success, but none in my opinion succeed in so few pages or in such inspiring, heart-to-mind immediacy as Hyams manages. It may not seem important to a souless, bloodless academic, but to many a martial artist for several generations it simply is without peer. There is nothing New Age or ridiculous about this book. I feel sorry for the people who don't understand how to appreciate it. This is written by a man who was deeply affected by Bruce Lee, most likely the greatest modern kung fu exponent of our age, because Lee was a kung fu warrior who lived in the world of hype and electrified delusion and he could see through it, even while using what it had to offer. Hollywood nothing. The only thing even remotely Hollywood about this book is the fact that Bruce Lee had been in Hong Kong Films and starred on a TV pilot that immediately replaced him before airing the actual show because Lee, as an actual Chinese, was "too Chinese" (meaning a white guy needed to interpret a

Chinese for us whites). Wow. That's so Hollywood of you, Bruce. On the reality side, Hyams transmits the inspirational genius that was everything in Bruce Lee. How to be fluid, like water, like the yin and yang of the Tao. How to dare to will to control one's own life. Yes, ignoring dental pain is possible... So what? Pain can be ignored. This is not the point of this book. There is, however, an abundance of stories about people who overcame their fears and anxieties and their lacking to go on to open up the horizon in their world. This is a book about taking control and navigating one's life, as a martial artist, as a warrior in the modern world, toward freedom of the spirit. It reminds us that we are alive and that we can do pretty much anything that we really WANT or need to do, not really about something so trivial and pointless as "going to the dentist without anesthetic". The emphasis is on freedom to get what we need and want out of life, not on merely testing ourselves through performing superhuman feats. Maybe for the Moderns in Hyams time and place, knee deep in the modernity of the late 60's and early 70's, it really did take such feats to convert a following, to shake off the certain medical materialism of the times. Today I think everyone has seen the guru walk on hot coals. Everyone has suspicions about authority. Everybody wonders what they could do and fantasizes about the nature of true experiential freedom, yet they do not usually follow through with it toward their own potential in the same manner Lee was fully advocating. What's truly remarkable is that someone showed Moderns of his time that they could walk red hot coals of modernity delusion completely unscathed, turn toward the world, wink, and then disappear from it's grasp into their own freedom, their own use of their own time, space and lives.

If you are a martial arts student or are just interested in martial arts, then this book is a must read. Hyams has written an important book. "Zen in the Martial Arts" is not really about martial arts, nor is it about Zen either. Using martial arts and his personal experiences, Hyams tries to explain the martial artists mind. There is a state where the artist stops thinking and just does. This is the point of this book. Hyams explains that most of the lessons are not taught but learned from the student at their pace when they are ready. Hyams also explains that the best teachers learn from their students as well as teach. For me, the most interesting note in this book was that Bruce Lee was not perfect, but had his own personal limitations and he worked within them. This was a big point within the book. This is a very good book and is a great place to start the mental portion of training. Highly recommended.

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