

Is Taekwon-Do Practical for Street Self Defence?

4th dan essay by Brett Kimberley

The answer to that question for me is yes. I believe that for myself, the years of training and studying Taekwon-Do and the skills I have gained as a means of improving my chances of defending myself in a street situation is huge compared to if I had never trained at all.

I say this because I know how fast I can move, I know how good my balance is, I know how strong my grip is, I know how fast my reactions have become, I know how strong my blocking and attacking tools have become, I know how fast and powerful my punches, strikes, and kicks have become, but most importantly I know how small my ego has become. And knowing the ego thing has let me know how good my skills at de-escalating have become.

Taekwon-Do, the art of self-defence. I started training in Taekwon-Do for that very reason, to learn to defend myself. I didn't choose Taekwon-Do for any other reason than it was the martial art being taught in the town where I lived at the time. I just thought I was going to go and learn some cool moves to be able to beat someone up who was trying to beat me up, obviously my ideas of that have changed considerably since then. Since I started training and Taekwon-Do became a way of life I have experienced so many awesome things that come along with Taekwon-Do such as the instructing, the tournaments, the coaching, the seminars and the friends I have made for life. But I always keep the thought in the back of my mind that this is about self-defence and that needs to be the bottom line with what we do.

I have my own person experiences where I have been involved in violent encounters and needed to defend myself physically and I do believe that my

Taekwon-Do skills played a big part in the outcome. That being that I was not seriously hurt.

That said though I have been involved more situations where violence could have taken place if it wasn't for me using words to prevent it from happening.

So now I can only give my thoughts and ideas on the subject because any question involving self-defence is the same question is, how long is a piece of string? This could be an essay or an entire encyclopaedia on the topic. We are lucky that have one of those already. And my thoughts with this essay are not based on the de-escalation side of the situation, I am thinking of the other extreme where that hasn't worked and there is going to be a physical engagement of violence.

For me personally it all comes down to the individual, there are those that take self-defence training seriously and those that don't. It is important to be in the right mind set when you are doing this particular type of training. The more realistic the training drills are the better. For this we need to really try and trick our mind into not being in safe comfort zone of the do jang walls but in a real intense and dangerous situation. Only the individual can create their mind set this way. I always encourage students to try and do this with visualization and using a bit of imagination.

If you look at soldiers, police, swat team, Special Forces and other front line men and women training in defence there is a definite seriousness about how they train and the mind set they train in. Why? Because for them it is real, they know that they will be putting themselves in situations where they are going to have to use this training for real and in many cases their very lives may depend on it.

When I look at a group of Taekwon-Do students going through self-defence drills and techniques too often the seriousness about what they are doing isn't there, I see giggling laughing and half-hearted attempts at manoeuvres and a general lack of intensity. Now this is not to say what they are doing isn't any good. It is just that we are in a very safe and comfortable environment, training with friends, and possibly thinking that a serious situation isn't going to happen to me.

To give a good example about how mind set plays a big part in how we train, when most of our black belts were at an instructor's course in Rotorua earlier this year being 2017, Master Pellow took us all through some stick self-defence and we all cruised along to the drills training and having a good time. Then out of nowhere he suddenly tipped a big bag of real knives out all over the floor, a cold sickening clang of steel blades sounded through the room and just like that the whole mood in that place changed. Suddenly things got a whole lot more serious as we were told to come and pick a weapon for next lot of drills. Now there was a real risk of injury and a completely different mind-set.

The point I am trying to make is that if self-defence training is not taken seriously then one could be setting themselves up for a shock, not from the potential level of skill of technique but from not tuning the fight reflex in the fight or flight responses. I remember hearing saying years ago, it is not the size of the dog in the fight, it is the size of the fight in the dog. The individual should not only train technique but also train the fight response. I am not saying that to fight is the answer by any means, and as Taekwon-Do practitioners we soon learn that violence is the last resort to a self-defence situation, but if the day ever comes where there is no other option then will the individual be ready mentally, will they be ready to flick the fight response switch in their mind and allow the indomitable spirit to take over? So once again my answer to the question put forth for this essay, Is Taekwon-Do practical for street self-defence? Yes. I don't think anyone who spends time in the dojang week in week out blocking, punching, striking and kicking could not have an advantage of defending themselves over someone who hasn't. But to what level?

One must create a high level of skill with their techniques and alongside that a strong level of mental toughness. I could start quoting the General on many other aspects of self-defence but we all have that knowledge within the art.

Some tips and ideas...

Train the mind as well as the fist and foot.

Remember if someone or some people have already made the conscious decision to use physical violence in a situation then they have already created the fight mind set and that will need to be matched.

Find ways to push outside the comfort zone when training, this will result in being better prepared for a real situation.

Set up different training scenarios and situations when training which forces the student to make quick decisive decisions and preparation strategies for dealing with the situation.

Regularly train with what I call street sparring, where no sparring gear is worn and grabbing and attacks below the belt are allowed (non-contact unless blocking). Two on to one also.

When practicing a particular technique, don't spend too much time stopping to see how it went, this can create a bad habit of stopping in a real situation. Practice continuing into another attack, if a particular technique doesn't work, the next attack needs to follow instantly as if it is part of the first attack and so on.

Practice kicking and striking pads using only your peripheral vision, for multiple attackers.

Practice getting back to your feet quickly if you go down, we are stand up fighters. (Ground techniques should be trained also).

Learn the soft tissue targets that can be injured without powerful blows. (This is crucial for grappling and ground self-defence).

Figure out your individual strengths, only build on your strengths and overcome your weaknesses.

Take training very serious; training should be enjoyed and to a certain level be fun, but serious fun.

Taekwon.

