

## **What Are Martial Arts?**

Something I'm asked on almost a daily basis is, "What actually is Martial Arts?"

Martial Art is a term given to all of the numerous and various styles of self defense and combat that have been arranged into systems. The term actually refers to the art of warfare and is named after Mars, the god of war.

Although people generally study martial arts for various reasons, martial arts share a single objective: to physically defeat the other persons and to defend oneself or others from physical threat.

The origins of the martial arts are unclear as so much knowledge and history has been passed on by way of oral tradition. It is safe to say though that virtually every culture throughout the world has had in their past the need to defend themselves physically.

As a result there are likely many origins and not a single source of the martial arts. At SHAKU Family Martial Arts we practice Kung-Fu, and trace our roots back some 1500 years when an Indian yogic named Bodhidharma (Ta-Mo in Chinese) is reported to have introduced the benefits of mental focus in aiding one's attainment of peace of mind to a group of pacifist monks in the Hunan province of China.

Unfortunately these monks, later to be revered as the Shaolin Temple Monks, were in such poor health that they were unable to reap the mental benefits of the meditation exercises due to their inability to sit comfortably for extended periods. It is legend that Bodhidharma developed a series of exercises (based on the movements of animals) to improve the cardiovascular, strength and flexibility of the monks. These exercises later evolved into applications of self-defense that the monks used to ward off bandits and enemies who were set on pillaging the temples. This is referred to as the five animal systems of Kung-Fu and is generally regarded as the forerunner of many modern day martial arts.

Eventually, the government of the day destroyed the Shaolin Temple fearing that it gave refuge to enemies of the emperor who posed the additional threat of being well trained fighters. The details of this legendary history are debatable. It is clear that fighting skills were widespread in China long before the founding of the Shaolin Temple. Nonetheless, the Shaolin Temple represents a first organized attempt to blend fighting techniques with moral and spiritual principals in an effort to understand violence and to deal with it in ways that best promote the virtues of compassion and peace. So within our school we are still committed to continuing this philosophy by emphasizing personal growth and development and the avoidance of violence whenever possible.

"A superior man is modest in his speech, but exceeds in his actions."

**Confucius**