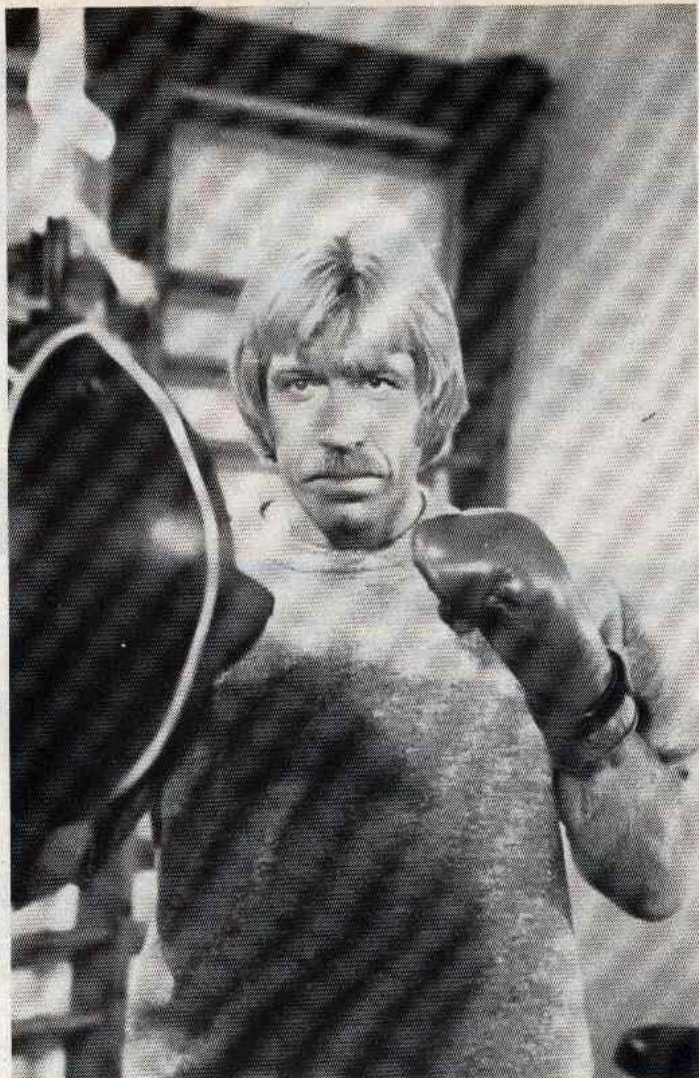


THE MENTAL TRAINING OF CHUCK NORRIS

An American
Approach to Developing
a Strong Mind

by Marcus Wynne



In many traditional arts, mind training means kneeling in meditation (right above). To Chuck Norris (above and right), it's creating positive images by visualization and affirmation.

Mind training. For some, it means David Carradine receiving his tutelage at his master's knees in the Shaolin Temple. For others, mind training is a class of silent, kneeling karateka, deep in meditation before a portrait of their master. For others still, it is a concept dismissed as old-fashioned and outdated in today's high-tech world of sports training specialists, Nautilus equipment, and scientifically designed nutrition programs.

But, for one very modern and up-to-date organization, Chuck Norris' United Fighting Arts Federation (UFAF), mind training is something altogether different. The primary objective of the organization is to provide a system of instruction that not only develops a karate student physically, but also emotionally, psychologically and mentally.

"When a person comes to one of my schools and says, 'Teach me karate,' he is actually saying, 'Make me a better person,'" Norris explains. "Karate is the vehicle by which we promote the mental and psychological growth of our students."

Discipline, self-improvement and personal growth have always been desirable results of karate training. But the role models traditionally held out for students to emulate have been Oriental, not American, and many practitioners have grown disillusioned with mind training that reinforces mental concepts which have their roots in Zen Buddhism, Taoism, or Confucianism.

"When the first karate people came to the United States after World War II, they brought not only the physical techniques of the martial arts, but their entire cultural baggage also," says Fred Rossmann, an instructor in the Norris sys-

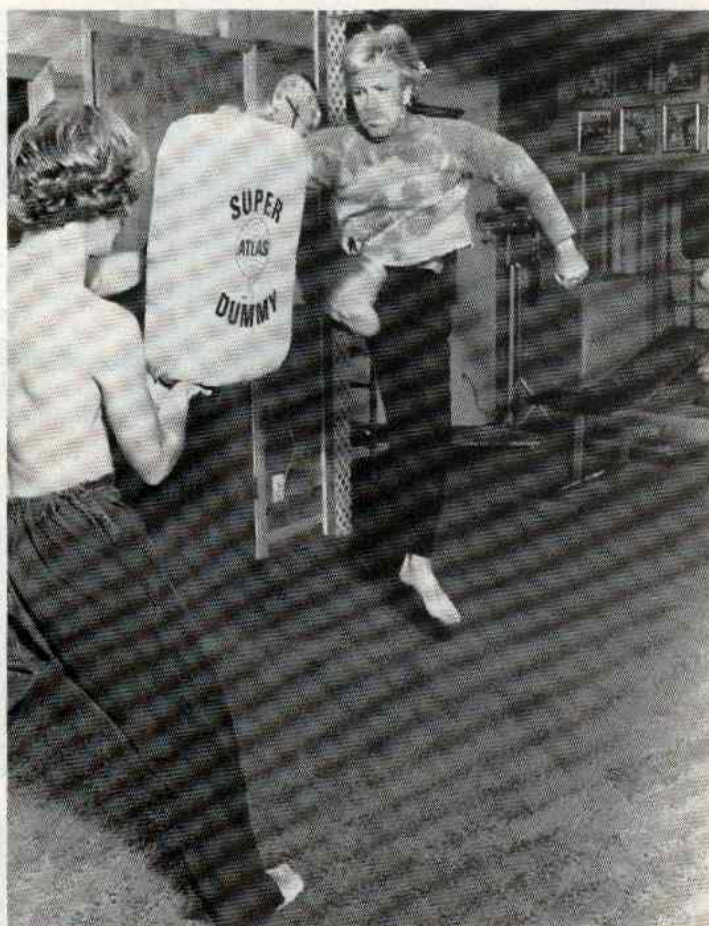
tem. "The problem is that the Oriental approach to training involves a nonlinear, circular way of thinking. Americans are not circular thinkers, they are linear thinkers."

It is difficult for the beginning karate student, a product of the goal-oriented American culture, to understand how passive, seated meditation derived from Zen Buddhism, or intricate breathing techniques that have their genesis in the exercises of an obscure monk named Daruma, will help him achieve his goal of mastery of the martial arts.

This is where the Norris organization shines. They have created a sophisticated *American* mind training system, and have applied it in such a way as to be readily accessible to the American karate student. The mental techniques utilized are simple and straightforward, emphasizing goal achievement and a positive, inventive approach to training. Most importantly, they produce measurable results within a short period of time.

The basic foundation of mind training is the cultivation of a positive mental attitude, according to Norris. "There is nothing easier than negativity," he claims. "It's human nature to be lazy, and it takes hard work to cultivate positivity, to truly believe in yourself. It's far easier for someone to say something negative about others, or themselves, than it is to find something positive to say."

For example, take a white belt on his first day of karate

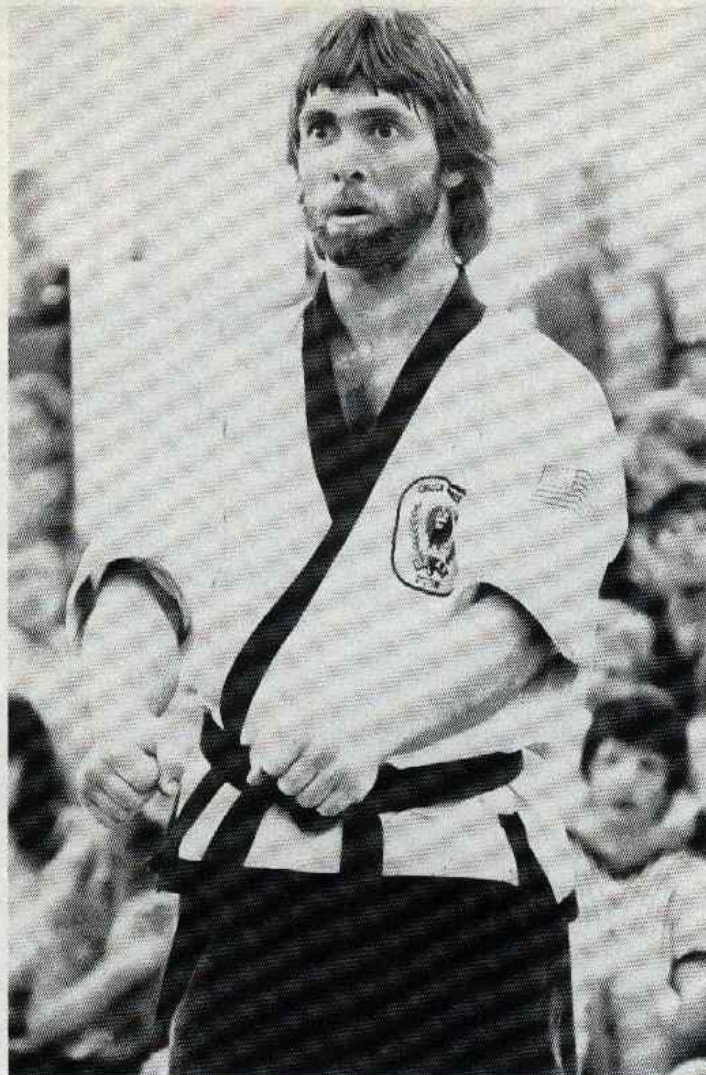


class. He may see senior students and instructors throwing kicks and practicing techniques that he, in his untrained state, cannot imagine himself ever doing. He thinks, "I can never throw a kick like that," or "I'll never be able to stretch that far," establishing a negative mental attitude immediately, which can easily develop into self-fulfilling prophecy. The more negative thoughts generated, the deeper negative imagery is planted in the subconscious, and the student becomes what he thinks—someone incapable of stretching or kicking well. Without constructive criticism and/or positive feedback after even small achievements (stretching to touch fingers, then palms, on the floor, or executing a good front kick), the student may take an unnecessarily long time to achieve proficiency, or may never develop to his fullest potential.

UFAF instructors provide this positive reinforcement in the classroom, and encourage positive attitudes outside the studio with a written code of ethics, a 12-point approach to positive self-discipline that is spelled out in the UFAF constitution.

"The key ingredient for success in life is the discipline of mind and body," Norris explains. "Setting goals and making sure they are accomplished builds discipline. Whatever goal I set for myself, I will first get a mental image in my mind of exactly what it is I want to achieve, then I will be determined and persistent enough to overcome all obstacles that get in my way toward that goal. Finally, I will train or study accordingly until that goal is accomplished."

Such self-discipline has taken Norris to the top of two intensely competitive worlds: tournament karate and action



Nationally rated fighter Chip Wright, an instructor in Norris' United Fighting Arts Federation, illustrates the intensity generated through constant practice of mind training techniques.

films.

"How did I succeed in Hollywood? The same way I succeeded in karate: I worked harder than anybody else," Norris asserts. "I created in my mind the image of what I wanted, what I wanted to be, and I worked toward that image harder than anyone else."

Visualization, the conscious creation of an image within the mind, is one of the training techniques encouraged by Norris. This method, in which an image of what a student wants to achieve or improve is implanted in the subconscious, is capable of shifting the visualizer's entire psyche toward the fulfillment of that particular mental picture. At the deepest levels of the mind, the brain and central nervous system cannot distinguish between something vividly imagined, and an actual occurrence.

"Say I'm walking down a dark alley and I see the shadows shift," Norris explains. "The resulting rush of adrenaline I get is the same as if there were actually someone there, whether there is or not."

Visualization/affirmation training can not only develop a strong mind, but can improve focus and form, as Wright demonstrates (right and above right) on UFAF instructor Jeff Scott.

By conscientiously training the mind to see and hold a positive self-image, visualization shifts the self toward becoming that image. By holding the image of a positive, self-disciplined person, and by performing precise, powerful karate techniques, the visualizer becomes that which he believes he is: a positive, self-disciplined person performing precise, powerful karate techniques. In effect, he creates himself. Of course, all the visualization in the world won't help if the subject doesn't practice his physical techniques. It doesn't do any good to visualize a perfect side kick if you never stretch out and throw some.

Visualization technique is one of the latest by-products of the human potential movement in psychology. Remarkably, Norris developed his visualization technique and applied it practically in training long before most other athletes in the U.S. did.

"I first began using PMA (positive mental attitude) when I was competing . . . In my mind, I always saw myself winning," he recalls. "I would create fight scenes, visualize my opponents, analyze their weaknesses, and create visions of myself countering their attacks."

Research in the Soviet Union corroborates Norris' belief that visualization is a powerful tool in optimal athletic performance. Soviet Bloc sports training experts have spent 30 years developing a system of visualization to train their Olympic athletes. The result? Extraordinary Olympic performances like those of Olga Korbut and Nadia Comaneci.

After the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, Soviet trainers divided athletes earmarked for the 1980 Games into four matched groups. The first group practiced traditionally, utilizing only physical training. The second group spent 25 percent of its training time doing visualization exercises. The third group expended 50 percent of its workout on physical training and 50 percent on mental work. The last group spent 75 percent of its time on mental training. Three-and



one-half years later, the most effective athletes in terms of overall performance were those who spent 75 percent of their time on mental training, followed by those who used 50 percent, and then those who spent 25 percent. The group with the lowest overall performance was that which trained only in traditional methods.

In order to achieve results like those of the Soviet athletes, it is necessary to break the habit of negative thinking and implant positive imagery at the deepest subconscious levels. To tap into the subconscious, the visualizer must be in a relaxed, calm, receptive state.

To prepare yourself for visualization work, sit in a relaxed, cross-legged position, or in a comfortable easy chair. Then close your eyes and spend as much time as necessary to relax. One method is to count your breaths, breathing deeply and fully, and then, starting at the feet, consciously tense and then relax all the major muscle groups. Tense the feet, then relax and move up to the calves. Next, tense and relax the thighs; the hips and genital region; the stomach and lower back; the chest and upper back; the neck and shoulder (where it may be necessary to spend extra time due to the amount of tension); and then finish with the face, tensing and relaxing all the small muscles, the jaw and forehead areas in particular.

Some visualizers claim that conjuring an image of walking down steps works for them. With each step they tell themselves they are progressively more relaxed, until at the bottom step they are completely relaxed. Experiment with

“Daily physical and mental training generates a feeling of confidence and positivity.”

the relaxation process until you find a method that suits you. You will recognize the relaxed, receptive state by its sensation of floating, as if you were lying in a water bed or drifting on an air mattress in a pool.

At this point, you are ready to create your training visualizations. For instance, to develop your side kick, begin by visualizing yourself with your leg properly chambered and kicking with a perfect release of power and snap. Don't just see this in a general sense; concentrate on detail and see yourself as clearly as possible. Imagine and feel which muscles you will use to kick, and which will be relaxed. See yourself kicking as clearly and in as much detail as an image on a television set. This is crucial: You must see yourself doing whatever it is you wish to do as clearly as though it were happening in front of you. This is not an easy ability to cultivate; there are many distractions, and deep-seated negativity may intrude. But with persistence, *anyone* can develop the ability to visualize at a deep level.

Chip Wright, a UFAF instructor and nationally ranked tournament fighter, describes his use of visualization this way: “I relax in a seated position, putting myself into as deep a state of relaxation as I can. Then I create an image of myself winning a match, or performing a specific technique against an opponent. I make this image in my mind's eye as clear as that of a television set, until I can see everything in detail. Then I visualize different opponents coming at me with different techniques, and I see myself moving to counter them. And I always see myself winning.” As Wright's tournament record attests, his method of mind training works.



Visualizing kicks and punches scoring on an opponent while training can help a fighter land techniques in actual sparring situations, as Wright (top) and Scott (above) do here.

To improve sparring skills, visualize yourself with an opponent. Picture yourself moving confidently in the ring, countering his techniques. See yourself launching powerful, unstoppable attacks. Combined with constant training, visualization will enable a beginning or advanced student to overcome tension that inhibits most inexperienced fighters in the ring.

Another mind technique utilized by Norris is affirmation training. Affirmation is the use of specific phrases to generate positive images. Many people defeat themselves before they even begin a project by enumerating all the pitfalls that might prevent them from achieving their goal. Playing mental tapes like, “I'll never be able to do this,” or “I'm not smart enough or strong enough or tough enough,” creates an expectation of failure. If you tell yourself that failure is your lot, then fail you will. The subconscious mind will strive to achieve the negative goal.

Affirmation technique seeks to replace negative tapes with positive ones. Rather than passively allowing negative thinking to play over and over in his mind, the student consciously monitors his thoughts and replaces negative ideas with positive catch phrases. These statements are designed to reinforce the student's image of achieving a particular goal. For instance, if he is working on developing his side kick, he might say, “Each day my side kick is stronger. Each

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time I kick, it is more powerful."

The fastest way to achieve your mental training goal is to combine both visualization and affirmation. While in the calm and receptive state described earlier, repeat your affirmations while visualizing an image to go with it. In the relaxed state, the repeated affirmations will ingrain themselves in the subconscious mind.

Jeff Scott, head instructor at a Norris affiliate school in San Jose, California, uses both affirmation and visualization in his personal training and in the training of his students. "I have my students write down exactly what it is they wish to improve or achieve," Scott says. "Then, each night, they practice their visualization and affirmation techniques on their own, keeping track of how often they do it. Also, they say their affirmations aloud to themselves before and during class."

Some of Scott's students record their affirmations on tape and play the tape to themselves before sleeping, and again upon awakening. Others write their affirmations on small signs and place them where they will see them—the car, bathroom mirror, refrigerator door, etc.

"I see results in three weeks," Scott claims. "Twenty-one days of consistent, conscientious mind training results in a measurable improvement in kicking and overall performance. Some of my students have reported results in shorter periods of time, but three weeks seems to be the average. The use of visualization and affirmation has enabled some of my students to cut the time necessary to learn techniques in half."

Daily physical and mental training generates a feeling of unshakable confidence and positivity. By eliminating the self-defeating habits of negative thinking, students can develop far beyond what they first thought possible. But the key word is "daily." It's not enough to generate positive imagery for 21 days. Positive mental attitude is a lifetime task.

As American writer Harry Emerson Fosdick once said about living the good life: "Hold a picture of yourself long and steady enough in your mind's eye and you will be drawn toward it . . . Great living starts with a picture held in your imagination of what you would like to do or be." ✕

About the Author: Marcus Wynne is a freelance writer and martial artist who has trained in the Chuck Norris system.

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