

The Will Power

Maurice Elmalem

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It's hard to imagine sitting down with Maurice Elmalem's comprehensive martial arts guide and getting through it in a day a week or even a month. In fact sitting down is likely the opposite of what Elmalem who holds a slew of world records and is a Seven Time World Champion in the martial arts is aiming for. With twenty five chapters in seven sections and more than 700 large black-and-white photographs of him in action the book accomplishes three things: It demystifies the martial arts for the uninitiated; it gives those already immersed new approaches to consider; and it makes you feel like getting up and *doing* something.

It helps that Elmalem doesn't look like a Hollywood-inspired mental picture of someone who has pursued martial arts for thirty-nine years; instead he looks like your everyday neighbor or friend. When reading the text or better still when attempting any one of the scores of poses and positions he illustrates in the photographs there's a feeling of reassurance not one of intimidation. Firmly yet gently Elmalem seems to say "If I can do it you can do it."

Halfway through the book there comes a moment when it seems as if the beginner and the more experienced martial artist are no longer on the same page. Certainly Elmalem does a yeoman's job of guiding the reader early on through everything one ought to do to pursue the martial arts intelligently—from aerobic exercise to meditation to a kind of breathing called "yaa." Then the book without explicitly doing so seems to ask the reader to look inward to assess their commitment level to the pursuit of the martial arts that Elmalem has tried to inspire. It's a subtle non-alienating approach and it's very much on the mark.

It is also worth continuing the journey through the other half of the book. For example Elmalem's dazzling identification in the first chapter of six kinds of pushups (power knuckle finger thumb wrist and back) is outdone many chapters later when he considers the many forms of the art of breaking—front punch wrist hammer fist knife hand back fist palm heel spear hand and the like.

Perhaps it is no accident that for his final chapter Elmalem examines how to apply the martial arts to self-defense. His demonstrations are bracing straightforward and empowering with moves like "Knife Attack to Chest or Shoulder"; "Defense Against Gun Attacker"; and "Defense Against Knife Strike in the Park." Yes these are chilling thoughts but even with that in mind Elmalem's ultimate outlook is astute. "All martial artists and non-martial artists must have a positive attitude" he writes. "This is the spirit of the martial arts."

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