



P. 07 5445 9116  
F. 07 5445 9116

3-5 Briggs St, Palmwoods  
PO Box 185 Nambour Q 4560

E. [info@martialartsaus.com](mailto:info@martialartsaus.com)  
W. [www.martialartsaus.com](http://www.martialartsaus.com)

## **SENSEI'S BLOGS:**

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### **Stoicism and Resilience**

Some time ago we considered the concepts of happiness and satisfaction.

While they are similar, we discovered that there was enormous leverage available in the capacity to distinguish between them. It wasn't a case of right and wrong... the secret was simple - choosing to be happy without the need to feel satisfied. This differentiation helps us to separate our emotional state from our aspirations. It allows us to be perfectly in the moment... holding a creative tension around a desirable future... without any of the negative 'emotional attachment' consequences.

Stoicism and Resilience are two more very similar characteristics that are valued in the martial arts and the broader community. Of course we perceive them both to be positive characteristics.

Stoicism is defined as "having great self control, fortitude or austerity – control of the passions and indifference to pleasure or pain". The image that comes to mind when I think of this quality is that of a Rock or a Mountain – huge, indomitable... apparently resistant to hardship and the passing of time. It also puts me in mind of something immovable.

Resilience is defined as "recoiling, springing back, readily recovering and resuming original form". The image that comes to mind first for me is Water – absorbing and reshaping itself.... or a sponge, meeting hard with soft and then springing back.

Sometimes I sense a certain type of fatalism behind the approach of the stoic as if there was an underlying expectation that the aim of life seems to be to test and wear us down. While stoicism may benefit us through its immovable aspect, there is also a feeling that immovable may be *immobile* - unable or unwilling to move even for itself. This image also reminds me that while it is an admirable quality, the price of stoicism can be high and is often unseen in the short term. Where stoicism may allow us to survive great hardship, the price will be great and the person will be considerably reduced by the effort.

Resilience, on the other hand, seems to contain the very essence of 'in' and 'yo' (yin and yang). Resilience is seen as the key attribute of the survivor. It allows people to survive similar hardships and yet somehow maintain or regain a fresh outlook... to retain a certain type of humour and to not have their positive expectations of the world altered.

So is resilience an inborn trait? Do we all have it? I don't believe it is inborn although we may have different degrees of some of the components that underpin resilient behaviour – optimism, courage, humour, stress tolerance and so on. I do believe that resilience can be developed from whatever level





of these components we have available at the outset. Resilience is like any other muscle – it benefits from challenge and practised use. And naturally enough, as a student of the classical martial arts, I believe a great environment in which to practice resilience is the Dojo. For those of us who don't practice in a Dojo however, life can be our Dojo. I'm sure that if you think about it, you will (like me) be able to think of many times in the day when you can practise resilience.

The conclusion – I feel that a little less stoicism and a little more resilience can be a very healthy shift for us and we might just find that life is more fun and rewarding than we thought.

**David**

