



Home › Volume 44 [2009–10] › Volume 44 Number 27 › Whatever it takes

Whatever it takes

CAREERS AND ED: MINI-BHANGRA, JEWISH CHOKEHOLDS, AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP P15
TWO VIEWS OF HOW BRUTAL CUTS ARE AFFECTING PUBLIC EDUCATION P12

GUARDIAN

APRIL 7 - 13, 2010 THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY GUARDIAN SFBG.COM VOL. 44, NO. 27 FREE



culture@sfbg.com

CAREERS AND ED It's not everyone's idea of a good time to be choked from behind and thrown into a wall repeatedly, although this is San Francisco. But this is no kinkster playground; rather, it's an unprepossessing mirrored studio on the Nob end of the Tenderloin where a diverse

group encompassing just about every age, gender, and athletic quotient gathers to learn the hand-to-hand combat and self-defense techniques of Krav Maga. Krav is martial without the art: crude but effective street-fighting techniques and counter-weight defenses honed into body memory through repetition, use of full force, and peer coaching. Unlike more rigidly codified martial arts systems, which put an emphasis on form and fair play, Krav puts an emphasis on “whatever it takes.” Whatever it takes to get home alive.

And the tradition of Krav Maga — “contact combat” in Hebrew — takes that mantra very seriously. Developed in the 1930s by Slovakian boxer Imi Lichtenfeld to help Jews defend themselves from anti-Semitic attacks, the “Israeli jujitsu” technique was honed by the Israeli Defense Forces for military purposes. Krav Maga San Francisco, founded in 1999 and owned by brown belt Barney Foland, offers 70 classes, and prepares you for any untoward situations.

A relative newcomer, I attend level one classes at Krav Maga San Francisco once or twice a week, schedule permitting. This week we’re learning to break free from a choke from behind, followed by a push. The first thing we learn when being thrown into a wall from behind is how to protect the face, blocking the impact with our forearms and turning our heads to the side. “That part’s pretty important,” our instructor quips. “You can’t see them now, because we painted over them, but there used to be blood spots on the wall where people bashed their noses.” Good to know.

The next step is breaking the choke, and though the movement itself is not complicated, training it to feel intuitive takes longer. Basically, the choker shoots an arm straight into the air and quick turns, breaking the hold through leverage. Of equal importance to the choke-break is the follow-through, defensive moves morphing into offense: hammer strikes, groin kicks, a few rapid-fire punches to the soft tissues. Without pads, we mime the strikes, which earlier we practiced at full force on unwieldy foam “shields”. The choking is real enough, though, as is the body-slam, and two days later, a tender spot the size of a thumb rests below my jawline, and bruises on my elbows attest to how I finally learned to not block with them.

The hardwiring process and use of full-force is what inspired me to take Krav in the first place. I had already taken an IMPACT (www.impactbayarea.org) self-defense seminar, which taught me how to take a fall and fight hard from the ground. But Krav aims to keep students on their feet. I find the benefit to training face-to-face against my peers (instead of a “padded suit”) is two-fold. Firstly I learn to strike with force against a person whose face I can see, and secondly, I learn to absorb their blows, a crucial key to surviving a real-life attack. Taking the time to help each class member master every skill genuinely is a top priority at Krav Maga SF. I’ve attended aerobics classes that were more competitive.

Foland assures me it’s the norm. “Anybody who wants to come in and train for competition, we send them down the street to the local kickboxing gym. You can be in a level one class and have level four students in there with you, and the only reason you would know it is because they’re really good, and they’re trying to help you learn. You show your skill by how much you help your partner.”

Of course, folks looking for a more graceful, philosophy-based martial art might ultimately decide that Krav Maga is just too rough around the edges. I think of the earnest man who attended an intro session about a month ago. He’d been blocking well all night, but balked when our instructor urged us to aim our punches for the throat, in order to cause “the most amount of damage in the quickest amount of time.”

“But couldn’t you damage someone permanently if you hit them in the Adam’s apple,” the man asked, concerned.

“I didn’t start the fight, remember,” our instructor said firmly. “But I’m going to finish it.”

KRAV MAGA SAN FRANCISCO

1455 Bush, SF

(415) 921-0612

www.kravmaga-sf.com



Like 0

ABOUT US

FOLLOW US

