

Hi, I'm Martin and I'm 39 years old. I was born in Bulgaria and worked there as a marketing specialist – in particular copywriter. Now I'm living in Norway. I came here to challenge myself – in different ways. And I found the different way of Taekwon-Do.

I have Cerebral palsy. I can walk but I'm not stable. My arms and legs often get stuck in muscle spasms.

But here in Norway I met Gunnar and found the practice of Taekwon-Do.

**That's how my journey toward better Me began:**

- Thanks to Gunnar I have already made my first steps in Taekwon-Do. And I started to discover myself – just like a child. With curiosity, passion, and a smile.
- So far Taekwon-Do is fun and a valuable road for me. It's a method for me to control my hands and legs. It's an activity that hones my motor skills and balance. It's a path to better Me.
- I have started to walk, with more confidence, enthusiasm, and curiosity. I began to discover what new things I'm capable of doing. To discover new perspectives of the effective movement. And new aspects of myself.
- Taekwon-Do gave me a really interesting perspective. During every training session I find new ways to move my legs and hands, to twist my body, to stand in a stable position. My reaction times are getting faster. My confidence is growing. This way I'm developing my efficiency in everyday life. I'm faster in household activities, more stable when walking outside, with faster reaction times when I have to catch the bus or step in somewhere. Or to step towards a new challenge.

That's my Taekwon-Do road: Constant and effective stepping into new activities, in new versions of me.

Thank you Gunnar!

Thank you for showing how I can be much more satisfied with myself. And this is a few words from my mom:

“Not even in my wildest dreams did I imagine that my son born with CP son would be able to train taekwondo. I was one of the happiest moms in the world when I saw him wearing the white kimono and starting the training with curiosity and enthusiasm in his eyes. I could see a progress in his balance and range of motion even after the first few training sessions. Thank you Norway, thank you Trondheim Taekwon-Do Club, thank you Gunnar! Respect!”

Respect, indeed.

So I really want this road to continue and to be capable of writing an inspiring story. A story for a new exciting friendship. A story for a special path toward success and progression.

A story for “I want, I can and I will in my way”

## **I can walk on this road**

When I was little boy I had to learn how important it is for the people to explain how and why I can't do certain things. This was not parents wanting to protect their child from getting hurt.

It was a persistent message that the world was trying to send me

“You can't do this. And you are not supposed to do this”

The world insisted on preventing me from doing things. With inaccessible sidewalks and public transportation, with inaccessible places for playing – and even with wired looks on me. And I kept hearing “You can't do this. And you are not supposed to do this” Apparently, in my country, Bulgaria, it is very important for people to convince you how many things are impossible for you to do...

And for me this message was much more emphasized. I was born with Cerebral palsy. I started walking when I was 5 years old. I had many surgeries on my legs in order to fix their position. I exercised with medical experts regularly.

So I watched movies like “Ninja Turtles” and “Mortal kombat” while the world was trying to convince me that I can never be so fast, strong, creative.

I started weight lifting in order to become stronger.

But there was always somebody or something to suggest to me that I would not be able to do what I want:

- I won't be able to walk
- I won't be able to graduate
- I won't be able to train
- I won't be able to work

And so on... impossibilities.

It seems like the world was telling me: You can't do this.

Well, I, my parents and my friends did not agree with that. We were not satisfied with this perspective. We are a bit rebellious. And our response to the above messages was to take the exact opposite attitude. So I began to convince myself that I could do more. That I'm able to do many things I want.

And that's how I started walking on my road ...

To me this road is fun, exciting, inspiring.

It's a road of self-development. Because it motivates me to break barriers in order to discover new and interesting things beyond. And it's logical that my favorite song became "Breaking the law" by Judas Priest.

Not that I have some great achievements. What matters is only the mindset that I can, and that I am satisfied when I break the barriers along my road. Fulfilled.

Thus when I manage to break some obstacle, problem, prejudice, fear I say to myself:

"Now I'm really satisfied."

As soon as I came to Norway I started to look for ways to break the obstacles and prejudices in front of me. In order to develop my personality. I started to learn Norwegian, to look for a job, to get familiar with Trondheim, to make friends.

And my road led me to Gunnar.

# The road of seeking and pushing – yourself

Gunnar is a great guy who shows me what Taekwondo is about. It's far more than a bunch of fighting techniques. It's an art of kicking and punching. Art that makes you better – physically, mentally, spiritually.

And first and foremost: Gunnar has shown me that I can walk on this road – and find a better version of myself.

He is a great guy.

We are on the same wave length. How did I know that?

Well, I immediately recognized it in to Gunnar's phrases:

First he says:

“I know it's difficult but let's try...”

And after that:

“Now I'm satisfied”.

And something in my head clicks. That's it. Spot on!

I understood that I can really walk on this road. Together with Gunnar.

We share the same way of thinking, the same attitude.

Thus I started to break new obstacles, prejudices, and stereotypes. It's an art indeed. Bulgarian doctors were telling me that I will never be able to walk and that it's not necessary to even try or practice.

But Gunnar says:

“Let's try. We'll find a way you to do this”

And I started walking...

On my road to Teakwon-Do.

And with more effective steps...

I'm becoming better and better.

It's an art, indeed...

And it works.

# How Taekwon-Do affects my Cerebral palsy

I can only speak for my case. I was diagnosed with Cerebral palsy at birth. When I try to move quickly or when something excites me more intensively I get spasms in my hands and legs. So it's difficult for me to move fast or make subtle movements, which require more concentration. Over the years, I realized that every person with Cerebral palsy is different and has unique capabilities. So everybody has to find their own road. And specific way to be more effective.

Strength training has been very helpful to me. Despite what doctors told me I have improved my body. Doctors generally recommend that people with CP avoid strength training because it might intensify their spasms. However what I experienced was exactly the opposite. I have taught myself to control the spasms in my arms and legs and to lift different weights in different ways.

The amazing thing is that my Taekwon-Do practice helped me make rapid improvements in my ability to control my arms and legs after only 3-4 sessions. This happened because

- Taekwon-Do is a method of control and of balancing your body and your mind. This is very important when it comes to people with Cerebral palsy because it causes decreased control. People with CP are struggling exactly with controlling the signals from their mind toward their arms and legs. But controlling these signals is the essential idea of Taekwon-Do practice.
- The first thing Gunnar emphasized was getting into the right position. This was the very beginning of my Taekwon-Do road. And it has crucial impact on all my movements. And especially on my walking.
- Gunnar teaches me how I can stand in the right position in order to make every movement more efficient. This, as I understood afterwards, is one of the Taekwon-Do philosophy's fundamentals. To be in a constant harmony with yourself. To achieve better balance. And to find your unique way of making progress. Despite all limitations.

- And my way toward this balance and progressing – my Do – has given immediate results. Thanks to Gunnar I started to practice many different foot positions that give me much more stability when hitting, blocking and walking. After a few sessions, my legs started to stand in these positions naturally. My feet point outward and this makes every step far more stable and secure. This was the first skill I acquired. Gunnar is always saying that if I'm in appropriate position to begin with, I will always be much more stable. The punches and blocks become stronger because the power comes from the whole body and the right step gives additional push.
- My everyday walking has also become more stable. I began to get my legs into the right position . For people with Cerebral palsy like me a huge problem is that spasms twist the legs inwards, which makes every step unstable – because the foot in front and the one in the back are often on the same line. This is the main reason I fall down often. The Taekwondo positions, however, train me to bring my legs outward as I step, to walk with bigger stride. This is what Gunnar calls Stable positions. And indeed I do became more stable and faster in walking.
- With him I practice these Stable positions often. We practice them in combinations with punches and blocks. He taught me 2 cool Taekwon-Do combinations – 4-direction punches and 4-direction blocks. In a nutshell these are combos of punches, blocks and twists in 4 directions in order to neutralize the opponents. With one of the movements I can block an opponent's strike and with the other, punch. And because I have had to practice moving quickly and sequentially, I have made a huge progress in assuming stable positions. And with every successful step in my training, in my Do-way, I get a “Now I'm satisfied” from Gunnar.
- I also say to myself “Now I'm satisfied”. I say it every time when I feel stability in my steps when walking outside. I say it every time when I step on to the bus. I say it every time when I'm climbing stairs or moving quickly in order to prepare myself for a certain task. I'm more often in the right position. A position that makes me much faster and more effective.

- The same applies to my use of my hands. Together with Gunnar I practice a lot of punches and effective hand positions. In these positions I have to stretch my hands or to fix them in block position and in positions for attack. These exercises have helped me develop my overall hand coordination. Now I'm much more confident when I have to get something from the fridge quickly, when I'm dressing up, cleaning at home, or cooking for example. I just have to stretch my hand. Before every movement was followed by a spasm. Now the spasms are almost gone and don't keep me from being quick and effective. Which is important because I have a lot of To-do's – to cook something for dinner before going to Norwegian class, for instance.

So this is my way. This is my road. The road on which I met Gunnar and Taekwon-Do. The road on which I see myself from new perspectives. The road on which I realize how many things I can already do – with passion, confidence and curiosity. Gunnar seems to be curious about this road too. And he shows me constantly that he is inspired to walk this road together with me. And to break stereotypes and barriers. In this spirit, during my first Taekwon-Do exam, Gunnar played my favorite song – “Breaking the law”

What do you think?

Did I pass the exam?