

Learning to Turn On the Aggression

Hillel executive director teaches students to be fast and furious in their own defense



Melissa Lesh (CAS'15) (left) and Shreya Deshmukh (ENG'15) work together to disarm Rabbi Michael Beyo during a weekly class in Krav Maga, a self-defense system used by the Israel Defense Forces.

KALMAN ZABARSKY

HOW TO “TURN on the aggression” is one of the more important lessons imparted by Rabbi Michael Beyo in his weekly class in Krav Maga, a self-defense system used by the Israel Defense Forces. The acting executive director of BU’s Florence & Chafetz Hillel House makes the point *very* loud and clear, urging students in his class to scream furiously during fights with attackers.

“Fear is important,” says Beyo, “because it can drive us to react, but for somebody who does not study and does not train, fear often makes them freeze, and you don’t want to freeze in a situation. You want to react.”

Fear, in fact, is what compelled Caitlin Coons to enroll in the class. While traveling abroad, she was assaulted on a subway, and to her continuing distress, she froze. “You always think you know what you’re going to do when you’re attacked,” says Coons (SED’15). “But it’s important to be able to power through the fear and defend yourself.”

Beyo keeps the sessions lively, without sacrificing urgency. In a recent class, students demonstrated ways to escape from various grips and attacks, struggling intensely one moment and bursting out in laughter the next.

WEB EXTRA
Watch a video of Rabbi Michael Beyo teaching Krav Maga at bu.edu/bostonia.

“Krav Maga is not an art,” says Beyo, who once worked in Israel for a counterterrorism special unit under the office of the prime minister. “Krav Maga is much more immediate and uses natural reactions instead of trying to impose new techniques to our body.”

Ideally, says Beyo, Krav Maga (or “contact combat,” in Hebrew) is not about fighting. It’s about ending fights: the main goal is to neutralize a threat and finish things as quickly as possible. The defense system combines techniques from boxing, Muay Thai, jujitsu, wrestling, and grappling with realistic fighting training.

The technique was developed in Bratislava, Slovakia, in the 1930s by Imi Lichtenfeld, who, along with a group of Jewish wrestlers and boxers, defended the streets of the Jewish quarter against anti-Semitic thugs.

Today the defense system, which has been refined over the years, is officially used for combat training in the Israel Defense Forces and has been adapted internationally for civilian, police, and military applications.

“It is an extremely useful and versatile self-defense system,” says Andrew Filippi (CAS’15). “I’ve taken several, but this one is probably the best.” ERIN THIBEAU (CAS’13)