

Frame and Field

Karl Jung allegedly said that the purpose of having a religion was to prevent a person from having religious experiences. I do not think he was making an anti-religious comment, rather I believe he was noting that life was so immensely miraculous that one could not take it in all at once, and that adopting a religion was a way to sanely manage the awe that living can bring to people.

At the risk of sounding like Martin Heidegger (except that I can be understood by the average human being), there is your Being (you and your unique experience of the world) and Everything Else in existence. **Our brains develop such that we take in only what we can handle.** As children, we take in Mommy's scent, and the sight of the part of her body that will furnish nourishment. Quickly that widens to Mommy's face, Daddy's face, our own toes, etc. If the process were not a gradual expansion, we would probably go insane trying to integrate it all, rather than becoming gradually more intelligent and more capable of integrating ourselves into the world.

All learning depends on the same sort of limited brain function. Have you ever tried to learn a new kata all-at-once without imitating the movements one-at-a-time? Good luck. Have you tried to learn a new kata while refereeing a sparring match? Can't be done. We focus (or create a personal Frame) in order to eliminate other claimants to our attention (the wider Field). This Frame/Field dichotomy is why we learn our art one technique at a time and why our art is divided into modules (like karate's Basics, Kata, Kicking, and Sparring) and why, in fact, an art is categorized with specific labels: Karate rather than Kempo, Ju-jutsu rather than Aiki-ju-jutsu, etc. **Limitation allows learning.**

During our learning process, our frame widens and we take in more of the field. At the edges of the frame are the items in the field with which we don't feel comfortable. Gradually those items are pulled more deeply into the center of the frame and, as the frame expands, new items are added. **Gradual expansion allows learning.**

Having created this modest analogy to the process of learning, I am relatively confident that most readers will accept and agree that it is relatively accurate. If that is the case, then I would ask: Why do we ignore certain items in the field in favor of others? Doesn't this willful ignorance simply lead to stylistic prejudice? For example, doesn't concentrating solely on kicks means ignoring throws which, in turn, results in our favoring TKD over Aikido? Doesn't limitation-to-learn result in a one-trick pony? Perhaps, but I would argue that we can erase any prejudice our learning creates simply by staying with the process. Gradually, as we add more (for example we may see the re-chambering of a kick as a throw), we see that whatever we add from our own system tends to resemble a system in which we were not originally interested when our frame was tiny.

This does *not* mean that all 50+ year martial artists, their frames widened by vast experience, will hold a similar content within their frames, but it *does* increase the chances that their contents will be more diverse than

those whose frames are smaller, ergo **the more mature the martial artist, theoretically at least, the less chance he has to fall into stylistic bias.**

Okay, seems reasonable. Now ask yourself the inverse question: Is there a reason, after having widened one's frame and rejected the concept of bias, that one would *retain* a stylistic *preference*?

Preference is not prejudice even though many people confuse them. Prejudice means judging some one or something *before one knows the facts*, i.e. a rush to judgment, while Preference is a personal choice based on one's own needs and background. Can you be honest enough with yourself, after you have really widened your frame, to admit that perhaps another martial art might have been closer to your liking? During my decades of teaching I have had several students, some of them quite senior, leave my instruction in favor of another system or teacher. My initial reaction was disappointment, of course, but as long as they acted in an honest and respectful manner, I wished them well without harboring ill feelings. Their frames, created in large part by my instruction, had opened wide enough to allow them to make a qualified judgment about what served their needs best. If I had attempted to keep them in my school artificially, through social pressure or veiled threats, it would have been like compelling them to contract their frames. And that is not what education is about.

The purpose of an educational establishment, a dojo, or a martial style is to prevent a student from taking on too much too soon, while allowing him to take in more when he is ready. Karl Jung might have agreed.