

## A Martial Salute

Isn't it great to see multi-style seminars take off in popularity? Although the days of style-bashing and budo-bad-mouthing may not be completely in the past, they are certainly receding faster as people from various systems share more, and work side-by-side toward broadening each other's perspective. In the 21st century, we are opting to "outgrow" the unreasonable style prejudice the martial arts experienced in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sick of stylistic bias, we have decided, wisely I think, that we are adult enough to see things more reasonably and want a brother-/sister-/personhood of martial arts and martial artists.

But harmony between systems should not imply an abandonment of criticism. We should be willing to be rationally critical of both our own and other systems. If not, that brother-/sisterhood will be at the expense of maintaining the quality of and pride in our own training system. An absence of rational critique or thoughtful questioning of another system prevents the system from "defending itself". The more reasonable a system is, the more likely we can understand it; the more likely we understand it, the more likely we will respect it.

The Navy Seals will never compete against the Army Special Forces in any way beyond an Annapolis vs. West Point game. Like Army vs. Navy, we may never actually contest against the other guy's system, so it is better to get along with each other, earning our rank in whatever way our instructor asks, and practicing our martial art until we get tired of it or are too old to move. But let's not do so blindly. Blind acceptance of every martial art no matter the skill or the source is as bad as blind pride.

In those multi-style seminars, we tend to bow or say "Sir" to those instructors of styles we may not especially like because those instructors are our seniors, just as, in a joint military operation, an army private would salute a Navy captain. The midshipmen at Annapolis might not give a passing nod to the plebs at West Point, but when they are serving together to defend the nation, each accords the other respect.

The martial arts are our nation. That nation is made up of all sorts of people with all sorts of preferences. We don't have to prefer Hung Gar to TKD or Shorin to Aikido, we can learn from each other, and to the extent we can learn from each other, we can respect each other. That should not, of course, diminish our stylistic pride. Just as Marines are damn proud to be Marines and Air Force pilots are damn proud to be Air Force pilots, so too can we be proud to be Hapkido stylists and yet respect and learn from Aikido-ka, and vice versa.

In order to respect a military rank, one has to know that the person *earned* his rank, even if he trained in things that are not *our* preferred mode of training. We don't have to respect 14-year-old Shihan or 30-year-old Grandmasters, but we should respect anyone who has trained in

martial arts sincerely because, despite our stylistic preferences, we have more in common than may first appear. And ultimately, most of us are on the same side.

END NOTE: *Admittedly, this sentiment seems rather obvious: have pride in what you do, but learn from what others do; respect what others do without diminishing the pride in what you have studied. What may not be obvious is how our own ancestors, despite their stylistic pride, managed to learn from those on the other side of the preference-divide, sometimes with great success, sometimes with sever conflict. (More on this next week and in other articles to come.)*