

An Accepting Attitude

In 1924 Funakoshi and his student Ohtsuka came to Yasuhiro Konishi at Keio University's kendo dojo to ask if they could teach karate there. Although Funakoshi had a letter of introduction, this idea was revolutionary (it was unheard of for martial arts to share a facility), but Konishi, who simply saw a way to learn more, quickly embraced it. Unfortunately, later in his life, Konishi was often reviled by other karate-ka who did not agree with his accepting attitude.

At the present time in martial arts history, most martial artists see the advantage of multi-disciplinary studies. When I was studying three martial arts in the seventies, that idea was a new one. The dominant philosophy from Japanese Budo (and I suspect other disciplines, as well) was that "if you chase two rabbits, you will catch none." This of course flies in the face of many staunchly traditional *budoka* who studied more than one martial art despite giving lip service to single-art loyalty.

Like most modern martial artists, I am strongly in favor of getting broad experience in martial training before settling on a more limited number of arts. At the same time, I do not believe in spreading oneself too thin. In fact, I chose not to study tai-chi, iaido, and Okinawan kobudo, which were available to me, simply because I could not devote enough time to them. Nevertheless, like Yasuhiro Konishi, I favor an accepting attitude when it comes to knowledge. Accepting attitudes, however, are precisely the attitudes that students can take advantage of.

From the student's point of view, he or she sees an opportunity to study something that looks like fun so s/he either jumps ship or tries to divide his/her time to incorporate the newly discovered art. Isn't it up to the student exactly how in-depth and devoted s/he is? In the modern consumer-oriented world, it is, but what about the teacher and, even more importantly, what about the quality of the art? I suspect that when the student's over-extended training schedule affects the quality of the art, the student will come around, but I could be wrong.

To what extent should a teacher allow a liberal pursuit of knowledge to weigh against a student's loyalty and in-depth study? To what extent should a student expect the teacher to teach advanced material if the student's thirst for knowledge trades a concerted effort in one art for survey courses in several? As a student, I would have been insulted if one of my teachers thought I was not mature enough to balance the three arts I studied six days a week (2-3 days each, taking double classes most Saturdays). As a teacher, I leave it up to my students to decide if they are going to drop one day of Aiki to study Silat in Boston, knowing full well that they are taking a risk of slowing their progress in each art and may soon get frustrated. But they are adults and they should have the right to choose. I tell them what my concerns are, and let them make the final decision, armed with that perspective.

But there is a certain level of acceptance that I do not accept. This is parallel with my tolerance of many political and religious points of view, many personal habits and practices that turn my tummy, and several other items that anyone in a broadly accepting, tolerant society must...well...tolerate. I find it difficult to tolerate intolerance itself, but also rudeness, conceit, and self-aggrandizement. Oh wait! I have been a martial artists for more than 50 years. I *do* tolerate those things, don't I?

More about an Accepting Attitude next time.