

A Future that is Ancient

This article was written especially for those potential students thinking of joining a traditional martial art.

When people study old *budo* (the ancient Eastern Martial Ways), they want to improve in some way. Even those who think that self-development is not a proper pursuit for warriors, they want to at least improve their skills in fighting or self-defense. They see the samurai or the old Okinawan karate masters or the Shaolin monks as fighting wizards who will help them aspire to a future that is, in essence, ancient. Actually they aspire to have some of the positive characteristics of past martial artists—I doubt if they would actually like to live in a Shaolin monastery or be an Okinawan farmer or even a medieval Japanese soldier.

Similarly, training in martial arts for self-development of any sort uses very old methods to improve oneself in the future. Why? Aren't new methods good enough? Things always improve, don't they? Mohammed Ali used this argument to contend that he could have beaten Joe Louis in Joe's prime. Things *do* improve and, to make room for them, we overlook things that do not seem to improve. (More about this in the next article.) In making way for the new, we lose contact with practices and values that seem rather outdated now, but that ultimately improve and enhance us gradually so that our future is better than our past.

One could argue that there are more millionaires today than in the fifties...true, but their money is worth a lot less. One could argue that there are more health-conscious individuals now than 30 or 40 years ago...true, but there are more unhealthy people as well. One could argue that there are more people today who are open to various cultures...true, but there are also more racial wars. One could also argue that there is more violence, damaged self-images, undirected psyches and unfulfilled spirits today...true, but there are also ways to address those concerns; one of them being traditional martial arts training.

I am not touting martial arts as a substitute for counseling or addressing severe problems in one's life, but I am suggesting that often the martial arts can help one find the self-confidence, positive self-image, focus, and fulfillment that the modern age seems to have quietly stripped away. We can't go back to the way it used to be, but we *can* be the way we want to be in the future, based on certain ideals of the past.

Traditional martial arts training offers one an ordered environment with a family of older "siblings" who will help you develop. Later, it provides younger siblings for you to help. It gives you goals that serve to benchmark the improvements over the old you. Training helps you face yourself in many ways (social, physical, educational,) but more or less at the pace and with the emphasis you choose.

When one begins training at BUSHIDO-KAI, a senior student takes you through the simple procedures we use to keep things orderly. He/she explains a few basic duties and who will be helping you. You are tutored alone or in a small group through your basics, and personal attention is paid to any skill that may provide a momentary challenge to you. You are coached until you enter the regular basics class where you train with seniors and peers at your own pace while still conforming to the regimen of the class and the curriculum we are working on at the time. You learn that you are at the temporarily bottom of the hierarchy, but that since

everyone else has been there, you are respected as long as you are willing to try. You achieve through your own efforts, but with the help of others. In a few months, you often feel that you have learned so much, you can't list it all, but what you do not see is the more subtle positive changes that being in a supportive, educational, challenging environment of possibilities does for you. The environment based on an ancient ideal, helps shape your future, and it is available now.

Next time, we talk about old dogs and new tricks.