

Bean Mud

I have a neighbor who rewards me with food whenever I do a favor for her. Her cakes and cookies are scrumptious, if fattening, and her pasta sauce is *delizioso*. But often she presents me with one of her favorites, lentils. “I have never been partial to lentils,” say I to her, “but thanks for the thought.”

“Ah, but you’ll like *my* lentils,” says she to me, increasing the difficulty of my saying Thanks but No Thanks. After a day or two, she never fails to ask how I liked them. If I report that the lentils were better than I expected, I can be sure I will get another bowl next time. If I report that they were lacking taste, she responds by presenting me with a tastier batch next time. Like them or not, I get a bowl of lentils that, truth be told, I don’t like. I suppose I could state the naked truth, “To me lentils taste like bean mud,” but that would be unnecessarily harsh toward a woman who is trying to express appreciation (while trying to draw a compliment).

Have you ever run into a martial arts enthusiast who, in trying to share his enthusiasm for his art or style, won’t hear that you don’t especially favor his art or style? It’s not that you think that Beano-do is a bane on all that practice it; it’s just that you see several stylistic traits that you think wouldn’t work for you, or practice regimens that you would not feel comfortable practicing. “But *our* school is not like that,” says he to you, “we don’t simply train semi-naked in the woods on humid summer evenings, we actually learn to use perspiration to our advantage.”

“I’m sure it is invigorating for you,” say you to him, “I don’t especially favor rewarding the mosquitoes with access to my body, but I’m sure it works for you.”

“If you set your *ki* correctly, they will not bite. That is one of the secrets of our system: setting the *ki* correctly.”

“I’m sure that is a fascinating study,” you respond, “but I tend to key more on my swatting speed than my ability to repel bugs with internal energy.” And thus does the interaction resume every time you see the fellow. You have the martial arts in common. You even have the spirit of sharing in common. But what he has that you do not is an extraordinary devotion to something you think should be inspire devotion only in the extraordinarily gullible.

“Maybe,” say you to yourself, “there is something to this Beano-do stuff, “maybe I am prejudging it. Just because I don’t favor it, doesn’t mean I shouldn’t learn more about it.” But after your second or third experience watching a class or enduring his demonstrations, you realize that one batch tastes like another and that you are not terribly partial to Beano-do mud. How do you ask for a reprieve from his rewarding you for your common martial proclivities without insulting his art or expressing your distaste for what tastes good to him?

With my neighbor, I've tried the direct approach, the indirect approach, and everything in between. Some people just have the need to express their kindness by sharing. Others express their enthusiasm the same way. Of course, my neighbor would never think of accepting any of my DVDs as a reward for a favor she did for me because she is not a martial artist and is not partial to things budo. And maybe therein lies the answer: the Beano-do enthusiast would never expect you to insist he watch *your* karate work out or experience the enthusiasm *you* feel after a *gasshuku* style training. Maybe you should just get him to do a favor for you. Even though it may not be his bowl of lentils, you can "reward" him for it.