

# *The Benefits of Budo*

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Look at any large city's yellow pages. Under Martial Arts will be a plethora of ads each extolling the overt benefits of training the martial arts (the Japanese call them *budo* or the "martial ways"): exercise, confidence, better grades in school (I suppose, for adults, this translates into more income at work,) etc. These are true benefits, but (1) they are not guaranteed to the martial artist any more than a healthy body is guaranteed to the person who visits a physician, and (2) they are not the only benefits of budo.

Sometimes subtle changes affect a person more than the big ones for which he/she enrolled in the first place. Kids enroll to become "movie stars." Teenagers enroll to become butt-kickin' dudes. Young adults enroll for self-defense; mature adults for spiritual and physical balance. Is it possible for one school, one art, to offer all these things to all these people? Offer? Yes. Deliver? Yes and no.

To the extent that a school plays up the movie star aspect of the martial arts, it will be weak on delivering serious self-defense. This is not because its techniques are somehow flawed, rather it is because the school has attracted a group of people who may not wish to put in the effort necessary to develop those techniques. If the school over-emphasizes butt-kickin' as a method of self-defense, it will be weak in delivering a spiritual/physical balance.

In a well-balanced academy of martial arts, especially those martial arts based on an Eastern cultural tradition, there are many subtle levels of benefits that the yellow pages cannot catalog and that students have difficulty expressing. My book [\*The Road to Mastery, An Explication of the Benefits of Budo\*](#) explains these in depth, but to give you an idea of how these "unstated" benefits come about, let me give a brief outline.

First, there are five conventional C's: Character, Commitment, Courage, Civility and Control. They are conventional simply because any self-development endeavor will include one or more of them. Then there is the gradual acceptance of the philosophy of action, that is: if one wants a goal (defending oneself, earning a rank, buying a car, or getting a job), one must take action. In the martial arts, you get nothing if you do nothing. Non-action is awfully difficult when you have to block a real punch or throw a real 200-pounder.

A traditional martial art puts its students in various circumstances that indirectly and subtly teach in three different ways: (1) they teach by analogy, (2) they teach life-lessons, and (3) they teach hidden lessons.

**Analogies** are created by physical circumstances that elucidate philosophical guidelines. These can be as simple as when a partner throws you, you naturally get up and next time you throw him. The analogy to life is obvious: get downed seven times, get up eight; less obvious in the same set of physical motions is the fact that both parties "win" by taking their turn "losing."

**Life-lessons** are learned through personal challenges in dealing with the curriculum, exam requirements, rules and regulations, customs of the school, and especially in dealing with other students.

There are also the very **subtle** but very powerful **benefits** of learning under a master instructor and experienced seniors. There is no easy way to state these subtle benefits (it took me 180 pages in the book), but the more serious the school is about teaching its arts traditionally with strong personal values (values commonly borne on the back of a traditional cultural heritage), the more subtle benefits await the practitioner.

*Next time, we'll discuss A Martial arts Adolescence.*