

Budo Soup

The analogies are obvious: a style is a mixture of ingredients formed by a talented “chef”. Too many cooks, however, can make a style untenable, too rich (or perhaps in too big a cauldron) to consume. Some soups are thin, some thick. Some are nourishing, some just plain salty, having too much of a good thing.

A TV ad for Progresso has a customer saying, “Step one: Eat the soup.” It is now standard to say, “eat the soup” although if the customer were served bouillon, he would probably say, “Step One: Drink the Soup.” Obviously one has to eat the vegetables and meat in the bowl and then drink the liquid, so technically, one both eats and drinks soup. What about stew? One definitely *eats* stew, occasionally complaining that it is too “soupy”. That means it is too liquidy, right? And don’t we drink liquids? We don’t want our stew too liquidy because we want to *eat* our stew.

But stew is not soup. So why do we default to “Eat the Soup”? When I was a kid, I used to complain about the soupiness of canned soup—not enough noodles or beef for my taste. A few years later, we got Campbell’s Chunky Soups and other brand’s versions of hearty soups, all of which were worthy of eating. But with a grilled cheese sandwich, it was usually tomato soup. I may have used a spoon to be polite, but I drank tomato soup. No chewing was necessary.

Eating takes more effort than drinking. Chewing each bite 8 to 20 times (depending on whose recommendation you are following) takes longer and uses more muscles. Drinks are usually the effortless chasers for the food, providing less nourishment (in most cases) and requiring less effort.

So I ask a simple question: is your budo system closer to a stew, rich in simple and complex carbohydrates, full of meaty protein, with a little liquid to wash it down, or is your budo closer to a bouillon, consistent and simple, pretty hot in the beginning and then increasingly easier to slurp down?

Does it take conscious effort to consume your budo or can you take a few belts here and there and get by with a new belt every few months? Is your budo nourishing and worth the effort, or simply a refreshing break in your day? If it is a stew, have you tried to water it down to make consumption easier? If it is a bouillon, have you considered adding some ramen and sliced meat to make it more hearty and satisfying?

Are you strictly a canned soup kind of student, plopping it in a bowl to heat for a few minutes in the microwave, or do you prepare the meal from scratch—or something in between? Canned soupers accept the contents of the can as equal in value to the original item, while from-scratch preparers try to duplicate or surpass the original item.

Are you interested in recipes or just in consumption? Recipe aficionados want to understand all the ingredients and their sources. Consumers just want a pleasant taste.

The rule of thumb...er...rule of tableware regarding eating vs. drinking, methinks, is this: if you use a spoon or fork, you are eating. If you use a cup or glass, you are drinking. Drinking can be sipped, but is more

likely to convert to swigging, slurping, and chug-a-lugging. Eating can be hurried, to be sure, but is more like to be chewed, taken a bit at a time, and digested more slowly, accompanied by more conversation.

Do you progress in your budo because you “Eat the soup”? Or do you progress in rank so quickly that the skills, which the rank represents, seem to have not come along for the meal?

Attach a string to an empty Progresso can and call your sensei.