

## *Dō Without Jutsu 2*

Why do I concur with Master Itosu when he says, “Dō without jutsu [the way without skill] is pointless”? It seems that popular martial arts like T’ai-chi, Taekwondo, and Aikido have accepted the fact that not all their adherents will be able to develop martial skills, but most will be able to benefit from the self-development aspects of these Ways.

I agree. No art, style, school, or instructor who does not screen enrollments to accept only the best athletes or the greatest potential *budoka* can expect to have all of its practitioners able to punch down tall building with a single pound and throw attacking locomotives over their shoulders. Still, I want to strongly claim that it is the intent to develop martial skill (jutsu) that changes the nature of the instruction, the mood in the school, and the kind of dō one achieves.

If you attend a martial arts school that emphasizes exercise, social interaction, or meditation, you must make some sacrifices to show up regularly and improve in the assigned curriculum. Okay, that’s a good start toward the dō (as manifested in self-development). You participate in the practice regularly. Great, dedication is a big contributor to developing the dō. After a while, the sensei judges your rank based on conformity to the curriculum, attendance, and skill at...skill at what? Exercise? Social interaction? Meditation?

Only when one practices techniques designed to deal with simulated real encounters, even if those encounters are stylized or adjusted in order to maintain a reasonable amount of safety, can the sensei estimate if the technique is performed correctly. Only when one has a way to determine if he can really block and strike or receive and throw an opponent, can one face the physical aspect of self-development in an objectively measurable way. So, even in dō-oriented arts, a little jutsu is important. Without jutsu, dō is pie-in-the-sky.

I am not an advocate of tough-guy martial arts where people have to spar every night, emulate life-or-death scenarios at full intensity while screaming unsavory epithets, or where recreate boot camp conditions so that students (a.k.a. recruits) know they have “the stuff”, but I do think that a strong emphasis on the jutsu aspect of budo must precede any real achievement of dō. Those who, in good faith and tender heart, aspire to a lifestyle of dō-without-that-nasty-jutsu, are simply seeking a formal way to recognize their good faith and tender heart, not a way to achieve a principled, centered lifestyle. They present themselves to what they feel is already a principled, centered practice, feeling that that practice will fit their already principled, centered attitude. They do not want to development themselves, but to affirm their established points of view. Like academics who, skilled in a certain field, feel that they are more brilliant in every field than the hoi-polloi, and thus are above becoming students again to gain a more objective knowledge of reality, those who seek dō without jutsu often feel they have already attained an enlightened spiritual state. Any work at true martial skill would be irrelevant because that is not the reason they are studying the budo.

Consider, on the other hand, a teenage hoodlum (oh, sorry, the politically correct label is “misguided youth”) who joins a martial art to be able to kick butt only to find that, in facing guys three times his age who can kick his backside quicker than he can spot an ad for the Swedish Bikini Team, he has a few things to learn and an attitude to adjust. Give him a decade or two. His jutsu becomes dō gradually, sincerely, and with the deep understanding of experience. He has transformed himself rather than reaffirming his chosen point-of-view.

Oh, I know, the elite academics and dilettantes among us are already beyond investing a decade or two. They are already bright and experienced enough to leap into the ether of the dō. Wiser than Master Itosu or his student Chyosin Chibana or Dave Lowry who wrote the article that inspired this one, they are happy where they are. Good luck to them. No, I won’t make the conclusion that they have sacrificed self-defense for a false inner peace; rather, they have sacrificed a true-inner peace for the trappings of spiritual superiority because they did not have the taste for the training that produces the skill of self-defense.