

100% Grated Parmesan 2

I looked more closely at the canister on the table in front of me. It did not say “100% Grated Parmesan”, but “100% Grated Parmesan Topping”. Adding the word “topping” allowed “Parmesan” to become an adjective modifying a topping that could be composed of various other ingredients. Sure the “100%” was deceptive, but on the pasta sauce, Parmesan and Parmesan Topping tastes about the same to those who never indulged in freshly grated Parmesan cheese, or for that matter, freshly prepared pasta sauce.

In my opinion, pure Parmesan grated at room temperature is a Leaning Tower above any factory made grated topping in a canister. By analogy, does that mean that a “pure” martial art is a Tokyo Tower above any eclectic martial art? If so, we should return to our analogy thinking that Parmesan mixed with Romano must be inferior to pure Parmesan, whether freshly grated or factory made. There is a distinction between purity, perceived quality, and a satisfied taste. High quality does not satisfy all tastes. Purity does not satisfy all tastes. That is why we have choices at the supermarket and in the marketplace of budo. And that is why some prefer pure Parmesan, some a mixture of Parm and Romano.

It used to be that stylistic purity (read: “authentic credentials from recognized organizations”) guaranteed the quality of the budo in question, however martial artists soon came to realize that even the authentic was never pure (most styles were mixtures), and the more austere the supposed purity, the more annoyingly self-righteous was the atmosphere. Both potential and practicing martial artists learned to value things other than “authenticity”.

People put up with “topping” instead of “pure Parmesan” because it is cheaper, easier, and to them tastes about the same. Now, you can rail against the ignorant masses that supported Secret Ninja Kempo-do Ryu to the extent that the head instructor retired to Florida at age 43, but a satisfying service must have been commercially offered at his studios in order for him to sell so many memberships. The problem is not that he satisfied a need, but that he could never satisfy *our* need. The problem is not that he ran a commercial enterprise, but that commercial enterprises established to satisfy consumer needs are not always in harmony with the type of budo that is meant to challenge practitioners in a way that increases personal development. You know, the kind we practice.

People buy budo for various reasons—self-defense, bragging rights, social interaction, exercise, etc. Although most people may set out to improve themselves, few are willing to work to get the benefits. Most are not terribly interested in challenging themselves to achieve difficult things such that they improve that part of their nature resistant to improvement.

Those who *really* wish to improve themselves are those who are willing to work *just to be accepted* by an institution that can help them. That’s why high school students take summer programs to boost their grades so that they can get accepted into a better college. Colleges are commercial

enterprises (perhaps too commercial in some cases), but students do not buy a college education as they would a martial arts program; rather, they pay for a college education once they have *earned* the right to enter into a college program, one that they must constantly earn the right to maintain. Paying a high tuition will not keep them from being flunked out. When was the last time you heard of a martial arts student being asked to leave the school for poor grades, lack of effort, or insubstantial preparation?

Although I like to see dojo as institutes of higher education, it is unlikely that the marketplace will ever see it my way. Instead, consumers will continue buying budo from those who will continue to satisfy their needs, because they are satisfied with “Parmesan topping” rather than the real thing.