

Karate-do, Karate-show

Shihan Tony Annesi, © 2009, Bushido-kai

Everyone knows that the martial arts superstar whom you see on screen, as good a martial artist as he may be, cannot really knock out ten crazed bikers wielding tire-irons and then back-flip onto the leader's Harley to do a Hi-Yo Silver before scrubbing out to rescue the damsel/sidekick/child in distress. That is movie martial arts and we all know it...sort of.

The problem is that movie martial arts emphasize the visual and we live in a fast-paced visually oriented society. Neon signs are not bright to illuminate dangerous corners, but to get our visual attention. We like the gymnastic, high-kicking, Jackie Chan/Jet Li type of martial arts and would love to see ourselves doing it. So, when we visit the local martial arts establishment to watch a class, we are impressed with the high-flying kicks and large arced throws. Some of it, we realize, is impractical, but darn it looks good!

We may not realize that Hollywood has a second home in our hometown. One of the schools you were evaluating emphasizes some of the movie moves precisely because they are impressive to watch!

Tae-kwon-do is the most practiced martial art in the West because of impressive looking kicks. Aikido is the most popular of throwing arts because of impressive looking throws. Each art *can* be effective on the street, but too often the impressive is not the effective.

If the potential student is interested in **aesthetic performance**, a type of matinee martial practice is ideal.

If one wants to study to **win competitions**, there has to be a balance between the visual and the practical. The judges have to recognize that you "scored," and appreciate your form as you did so. Here you look impressive because you *looked* effective.

If one wants **self-defense**, then the visual should be of no concern at all.

And if one wants **self-development** through martial training, one has to decide what martial method will afford that self-development. Will aesthetically pleasing practice do it for you? Will sport do it for you? Or will self-defense ability do it for you? All three can provide challenges that help you improve yourself.

In traditional karate-do (as opposed to "karate-show"), the aesthetically pleasing is either a by-product of proper technique or simply a method used to test and challenge one's self-perfection. How it looks to others is not of prime importance. In traditional karate-do (or other traditional martial arts), success in simulated combat is the method by which one tests one's development. It is not that a student is expected to win every encounter, but that the effectiveness of a technique (measured by the instructor's judgment, by objective drills, and by tests) offers an objective goal the student attempts to achieve.

Therein lies the challenge. Self-development lies in facing what one has to do to meet the challenge.

It is very difficult to be objective about one's martial art. It is even more difficult to be objective about arts one knows little about. The potential student may find it arduous to judge whether one art is really more effective than another, but he/she will not find it difficult to judge whether the art is of the SHOW or DÔ (Way of life) variety. Flash is a small amount of riches in a pan. The Way is long and is not always neon-lit.

Next week, we'll talk about the plusses and minuses of contracts and other commitments.

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