

The Little Blue Book

Back in junior high school, Mrs. Kapsiunas, perhaps because she was of Greek ethnicity, managed to convince the school board that a course in Ancient History should be valuable to us. This was pretty daring for those days considering that most junior high schoolers, at the time, were studying either American History or Civics. She managed to locate a little blue book, about 7 inches high by 4 inches wide by 2 inches thick to serve as our reference. As a result, we knew about Tiglath Pilizer III and Ashurbanipal, Solon and The Punic Wars, Carthage and Hannibal well before other students picked up the knowledge in some undergraduate requirement.

I wish I had a copy of that little blue book today because it would serve as an easy-to-read reference to a subject that laid the foundation for the cultures of the Western world. Alas, a high school National Honor Society project shipped those blue books off to Africa to help other kids less fortunate than we.

Now let's say you were practicing your style of martial arts from its own little blue book. You would certainly learn more than the average student who did not have that stylistic guide. In fact, just as we might have believed we "knew" ancient history, you might believe you "know" karate. And just as we knew more about that subject than the average junior high school student, you might know more about your martial art than the average kyu or early dan rank. But the little blue book was not capable of teaching junior high school students a college level history of the ancient world, let alone a graduate level knowledge of that subject. Similarly, your system teaches you a great deal, but is limited by its 7x4x2 blue covers. At some level in your development, probably at a middle or upper dan level, if you want your martial arts knowledge to grow beyond the junior high school level, you put the book on the shelf for occasional reference and start reading other volumes.

Ask yourself: Is your goal in martial arts to represent the art you teach or to be able to use the martial skill you have learned? You might protest that one does not negate the other, and to some degree, I might agree with you. Certainly, a student skilled in a specific art would both accurately represent its teachings as well as be able to apply it to self-defense. However, personal protection scenarios are many and various. As soon as the scenario leaves those commonly taught by a certain art, a student's ability to well represent that art leaves him, too.

In the high-level bujutsu of yore, there was a skilled called *kan* or intuition. Not only did it imply that a trainee could intuit an opponent's move, but also that he had risen above both blind repetition and active analysis. In other words, he might actually do something that did not seem to represent his style, but that instead represented his whole martial art.

Similarly, I would suggest that modern martial artists can and should make such leaps. If they study a traditional style like Uechi, they may want to learn a few fundamental kata of Shotokan. If they

study Shotokan, they may want to learn the three traditional Uechi forms. If they study karate, they may want to take seminars in Aikido. If they study Aikido, they want to learn some karate stances, blocks, punches and kicks. They need their stylistic blue book to delimit and thus concentrate their learning; however, if they stay with their stylistic blue book at an upper dan level, they are fated to well represent a style that only partially represents an art, which in turn, only partially represents the wider field of budo, and may never represent an holistic self-defense.