

## Mind, Body, Spirit, and Social Interaction? *Part One*

Storefront windows, yellow page display ads, and even decals on the dojo walls proclaim it. Traditional martial arts are supposed to be about self-development in BODY, MIND and SPIRIT. What about SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT? Originally, modern Japanese *budo* was intended not only to produce fighting spirit but also to concentrate youth on the ancient values made famous by the samurai class.

One can get into interesting debates about the qualities of the samurai warriors and the fact that their very class-title meant servant. One can argue over whether The Code of Bushido (The Way of the Warrior) was actually adhered to and whether it was invented to keep order among a disorderly fighting class. But there is little doubt that what we have inherited from the samurai, accurately or inaccurately, intended or not, is a sense that a code of ethics is appropriate, a sense that a martial artist acts properly and politely, much as a well trained soldier should.

But do we behave according to that code? Recently a very highly ranked friend of mind, the head of a federation that administrates a martial system, called me in order to vent. It seems that during a seminar in which he was trying to teach some details of stance in order to improve punches — any style's punches — black belts students were not only resisting his instruction, but were also acting out in way that seemed publicly rude if not outright challenging. He wasn't upset that they did not take his word for the skills he was showing, rather he was upset that *their* instructors, standing in hearing distance, did not pull the students off the mat and figuratively smack their ears. Not only were the black belt students being rude to a high-ranking visiting instructor, they were poorly representing their school, and their own instructors. And with those very instructors right there!

Now why, pray tell, would a few black belt level martial artists lose a sense of decorum during a public seminar? Although they had been trained in traditional martial arts, they were also studying mixed martial arts (read "cage fighting") a couple of times per week in their own dojo. The more students a dojo satisfies with the latest popular trends, the more students the dojo retains. But my friend was teaching them something they could apply on the traditional mat AND in the non-traditional cage. So why the unexpected lack of propriety?

Whenever one trains in a competitive sport, especially a one-on-one combative sport, one is forced to be realistic and, at the same time, forced to exaggerate his abilities. Any reader of my essays knows that I advocate traditional martial arts training that incorporates tests so that one does not take a journey into fantasyland regarding one's techniques or one's abilities. The current cultural wisdom suggests that cage fighting repudiates all the phony fantasies of traditional martial arts in favor of the real world. In traditional martial arts, it is said, one never makes contact, one never receives a punch; therefore, one never knows if one could actually emerge victorious in a confrontation — a fair criticism, I think. Because one never knows if one could actually emerge victorious, one becomes modest, polite, and avoids confrontation. In cage fighting, does a practitioner actually know if he would emerge victorious in a life and death struggle or suddenly being accosted on the street? No

rather he knows only what his competition record is. Most cage fighting trainees “spar” each other in class, not in the cage, and certainly not on the street. They only know how many times they won during that class. Everyone, therefore, tells “war stories” about their victories, never mentioning the times they tapped out or were knocked down. They do not take turns “winning” and “losing” the way traditional martial artists do; rather, in order to feel they could handle themselves on the street, they emphasize their wins and ignore their losses. If pressed, they make fantasy excuses such as “Yeah, but if he hadn’t thrown a low blow, he wouldn’ta folded me over for the takedown,” or “If I hadn’t been tired from three other matches, he couldn’ta choked me out.”

In order to both psych themselves up for their next match, and simultaneously psych out their opponents, their emphasis is not on modesty but on braggadocio.

In a military barracks where recruits have to be tough but also have to be disciplined, there is certainly one-upmanship, but troopers are expected to salute and say “Yes, sir”, support fellow trainees, and show respect at all times to seniors. Conversely, on the street, there is certainly one-upmanship, but it is a way of life because toughness can mean survival when you don’t know when some badass is going to get on your case. Traditional martial arts are related to ancient military methods. Modern cage fighting is related to street brawlers. Which one tends to produce a better social culture among trainees? In which culture would you rather live?

The offending black belt student approached my friend, the visiting instructor, after the seminar and privately apologized for giving him a hard time. He did so, I think, because he had been taught, as a traditional martial artist, that giving a senior instructor a hard time is unacceptable. To my way of thinking, he had his proportions inverted. If he made a *faux-pas*, he should have apologized in public. If he had had some doubts about the effectiveness of what the instructor was teaching, that should have been a private discussion. Behind all of this, however, was the offending party’s instructor. He was the sergeant that not only did not discipline the inappropriate behavior of his buck-private, but also did not even call the grunts to attention when a senior officer walked in.

*More on this subject next time.*