

Mind, Body, Spirit, and Social Interaction? *Part Two*

Decades ago, a visiting black belt from New York, well trained in traditional karate, but wary of the situation on the streets outside his home dojo, was welcomed to Bushido-kai. He was a great sparrer, had terrific form, was as fast as an unwanted twitch, and had a friendly, polite demeanor. We were glad to have him.

In my dojo, no students are allowed to spar with each other unless a black belt is watching. This eliminates any disagreements as to who scored on whom. The only exception is that black belts can spar with anyone without additional supervision. For some reason in the warm up before class, our visiting black belt got into a loud interaction with one of the brown belts over a perceived illegality during sparring. As we were lining up, the static turned into a pushing match.

I seldom get angry with students, trying to show the self-control I want them to show, but this demanded some quick and sharp sergeant-like intervention. Without touching them, I walked up to them loudly demanding that they take it outside, if they wanted, but not to bother showing up inside again. Then I pointed to the door, told them to go into the upstairs changing room and come out when they had decided what course was appropriate. I don't know who had been right or who was at fault, but I was very disappointed in the newly arrived black belt for not controlling the situation. They had made a public spectacle of themselves so a private apology to me after class, although a step in the right direction, would not remedy the offense. To my relief, after the warm-ups were over, both students asked to bow on the mat. The black belt asked my permission to address the class. "We have agreed that I would speak for both of us. I want to offer our apologies to sensei and to the dojo for our inappropriate loss of control. It will not happen again."

Thank you! People can lose their decorum at times, but if they handle the loss like well-trained traditional martial artists — with modesty, contriteness, and respect — as far as I am concerned, that is a point in their column. Their having concentrated on BODY, MIND, and SPIRIT through the traditional martial arts in a disciplined, polite, and rank-aware dojo had produced an unexpected result: disciplined, polite, and considerate social interaction, whether they liked it or not, whether they felt they were right or not, whether they wanted to win or not.

During the 1970s, I worked for Mike Burg's *Academy of Physical and Social Development*, a gymnasium school that used sports to help kids with their self-confidence and their interactions with other kids. This wasn't a dojo and did not emphasize the mental or spiritual, except in a peripheral way, but it recognized that the physical is related to the social. Mike Burg knew, not because it was his prime emphasis, but because small emphases support larger ones, that getting good at competition can lead to getting bad at social interactions so that each had to be emphasized to produce a balanced student.

So, when a cage-fighting student is impolite, even rude, to a visiting traditional instructor because he thinks the traditionalist, despite his seniority, has nothing to offer ([see last week's offering](#)), he is displaying not only how far he has diverged from the traditional martial arts he is also displaying how imbalanced his martial

training has become. Even if we assume he is baddest dude in the valley, that has no more import than suggesting that a raw enlistee from an Oklahoma farm might be able to kick a seasoned general's four-star backside. If you think that that fact is important in any other venue than a sporting contest, please enroll in the closest cage fighting class and experience not the punches and takedowns, but the attitudes of those who think they are Oklahoma farm-boys; then ask yourself how you would go about fitting in socially. If you kept to yourself, you'd be fodder for the next sparring match. If you bragged aloud, you'd eventually have to back it up against the farm-boy because, evidently, no sergeant is around to demand that you pipe down. Your only recourse is to tell war-stories to those who will listen, psyching yourself up for the day when your fantasies meet farm-boy's fists.

So what has this society produced? Tough guys who act tough and not-so-tough guys who feel they have to act tough. If they can't psych out their future opponents, a convenient target might be the fantasy-based traditional martial artist who supposedly doesn't have the guts to do the real thing (as they see "real")...and the higher ranked instructor to which one can be publicly rude, the more one psychs up oneself.

Maybe I am looking at things through traditionally stained glass, but I prefer a social atmosphere of respectful interaction and mutual benefit to that of war-stories and psych-outs in the name of supposedly realistic physical skills. With or without skills, interacting with fellow trainees is part of the martial arts experience. A more pleasant interaction helps one look forward to training for a lifetime.