

Old Dogs and New Tricks II

There are other new developments that are less questionable than those exemplified in the last article. They are the teaching of martial arts to all classes and ages, the merging of self-defense and self-image through training, and the application of modern teaching methods.

Martial arts, as the name implies, were at one time for the military class, or at least reserved for men who expected to fight, but martial arts in many peaceful cultures began to be seen as disciplines that could help first the non-military man, then the person who was not of the military class, then women and children.

All this happened well before the modern age. Democratic, Western thinking makes activities even more open to everyone whenever possible, so martial arts now offers training to nearly everyone and emphasizes aspects in addition to fighting or self-defense. This is why there is such a large range of arts: from those that emphasize health, those that emphasize aesthetic performance, discipline, self-defense, culture, conditioning, competition, and those that emphasize general self-development. This is a positive progress as long as the schools that teach those arts make clear their prime emphasis.

Too often, a kid who wants practical self-defense gets sent to a school that enters him into competitions, implying that if you can win a trophy, you can win a fight. Sorry, not always true. Too often, a person who wants self-development in a very holistic way ends up in a street-tough school that tries to temper the person's bones by training on steel pipes. Too often, a person who wants to trim down through karate-robbics enters a school that is trying to teach a modified Asian cultural art. The old dog of the martial arts has learned a few new tricks, but sometimes its masters keep them quiet so the dog gets a few more biscuits.

Probably the most important "new" development is the use of modern teaching methods. Even in very traditional schools in which the methods that have been used for 50 to 200 years are employed, people are utilizing games, drills, videotapes, questions and answers, problem solving and many other techniques unheard of in either the West or the East even a few decades ago.

Although karate has a tradition dating back perhaps 1500 years to China, its development as karate is less than 300 years old. Its export from the Far East is less than 60 years old. Ju-jutsu has a history in Japan of at least 1100 years, but its modern counterpart, sport judo, is only 125 years old. Aiki-ju-jutsu dates back to the 800s in Japan but its modern incarnation is carried on by federations which are just decades old.

Old martial arts taught very few people for very limited reasons in very specific ways. Modern martial arts teach large numbers of people, for greatly diverse reasons, in any number of ways. In the transition, there is no doubt that sometimes the martial was sacrificed for the art; there is no doubt that sometimes the quality was ignored for the quantity. New tricks were purchased at a price, but the price also bought the continuance of the martial arts in the modern age. Yes we have to watch out for quality and have to be careful exactly where we

put our efforts to get what we want from training, but we also have the advantage of knowing there is a large choice available to us in both schools and emphases.

Old dog with new tricks. No bones about it.

Next time, the subject will be “No one does that to me and gets away with it.”