

Proper Emotions 2

For decades in American culture, it was difficult for many to respect a policeman or a soldier. We had seen too many images of police overreacting, from the 1968 Democratic National Convention to the arrest of Rodney King. We had heard horror stories of the military acting savagely, from Mai Lai to Abu Graib. If you can, however, put those aside and consider what you would like the men and women in blue or khaki to be. Your positive image is the reality of many cops and troopers who don't get as much press (the exception being the first-responders of 9/11.) Police and military actions tempered with properly trained and modulated emotions are actually more prevalent than are the abuses that take the headlines, but abuses take the headlines precisely *because* they are unusual.

I am not so idealistic as to assume that because one wears a uniform and has endured basic training that one becomes a mild-mannered reporter with a Superman alter ego. I am suggesting that, whether or not they are mild mannered, they have an altered superego. Those who are trained are as human as those who aren't; the main difference is that modern knights are charged with a responsibility. Forget the bulbous billy club brandishing good old boys in blue beating down Birmingham freedom riders and think of Big Apple cops keeping order and saving lives during 9/11.

How would you represent yourself if you were wearing Officer O'Malley's badge covered with the grit of 9/11 or had volunteered to serve in the Armed Forces and tote fifty pounds of equipment into to a war zone? Now, transfer that representation to your position as a martial artist and you will have the beginning of the sort of emotional balance I am referring to. You may want to get the bad guy, but you first need to help the good guy. And that sort of emotional balance is the beginning of practical wisdom, controlled judgment, i.e. Aristotle's *phronesis*.

This phronesis stuff seems to fly in the face of the 1960's zeitgeist of "If it feels good, do it," or "Don't you worry 'bout tomorrow, baby, na-na-na-nanana, live for today." It hails back to an older day when the Greeks advocated "moderation in all things." Modern day Greece would probably be financially better off if it had heeded its own ancient advice.

Just as you don't want cops overreacting, you might consider tempering your reaction to things, not because you are likely to perform a *shuto-uchi* to the epiglottis of your coworker if he spills coffee in your car, but because the steam you force yourself to compress when he does, eventually will come out as F-bombs to your children when they forget to clean their closets for the fifth time.

Just as you don't want soldiers who, when a fellow fighter is down at the front, leave him behind because their tours of duty are up in 12 hours and they don't want to take any chances, so too you may not want to ignore a dojo buddy who could use a ride, use some help after class, or use a partner in an exam.

Sure, it is not the big, important stuff that cops and soldiers have to deal with, and No, you are not really a coat-of-arms-carrying knight on or off horseback, but you have left the live-for-today/live-for-your-

immediate-pleasure attitude of the last half of the 20th century and journeyed into a land more commonly called mental and emotional maturity. Too few martial artists go there and when they do, they seem to go as tourists.

I revere my own childish side, but when it comes to tempering my emotions to make better decisions, I'd prefer the experienced grown-up side, thanks, in uniform or out.