

The Reason We Train

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Whenever anyone gives you a reason for doing something, they will probably have a putative reason, and a deeper unspoken reason. There are many overtly stated reasons for studying traditional martial arts. In fact, three years ago, in an article called *Types of Martial Arts School*, an early submission to BUSHIDO-KAI's weekly web log, I discussed some of them by delineating the kinds of martial art studies that were available. Briefly, the four types of martial art emphases are self-defense, sport, art, and self-development. Of course, this list makes each individual reason into a less-than-refined generic, but these summary topics will do for the purpose of this short essay.

I have claimed that the initial reason most people train in the martial arts is self-defense. The uninformed may go into an MMA school because they have seen several UFC fights and noticed that the combatants on TV look pretty darn tough. Since they wish to be tough as well, they mentally connect full-contact sport with practical self-defense. Others, aware that MMA is a sport, want to feel the thrill of trading real blows and throws, knowing that their MMA career will likely be as short as their high school track career. A certain minority feels that traditional martial arts are artistic, beautiful, and full of potential self-expression. They enter training either to go into tournament kata or to do their art in their own little dojo satisfied with their private artistic self-improvement. In other words, they may be willing to mix sport with art and/or art with self-development.

You may draw the conclusion here that the most elementary reason everyone studies the martial arts is for some sort of personal development. And you would be right, of course, but I would like to take that private, non-reported reason one more step. If one's reputed reason for training is self-development, what is the deeper reason? In other words, what is the fundamental reason anyone would want to train for self-defense, sport, art, or self-development in the first place?

The seminal psychological reason we train is to travel a road to happiness. Most likely, we do not see training itself as the achievement of happiness, although we can experience joy while training, but we train to come ever closer to our own idea of self-improvement, and we do *that* so that we will feel happy with ourselves.

Now extricate yourself from this discussion for a moment and ask yourself an even more fundamental question: what makes a person happy with him/herself? Philosophers and psychologists offer a number of ideas on this subject. Here is mine: We feel happy with ourselves to the extent that we feel capable of earning, and are reasonably successful at earning, that which we are worthy of having or being. If that sounds a little to philosophically verbose, let's say it in simpler psychological terms. We are happy to the extent that we have a healthy self-image. The martial arts have long been touted as a road to a better self-image. There are several reasons for this (see my book *The Road to Mastery* for many of

them), but put in quick-and-easy terms they are these: the traditional martial arts gives you worthy goals, a method to achieve them, the help to overcome obstacles, and most of all, challenges to overcome so that a sense of capability develops as you reach higher and higher goals.

We may say we train to learn an interesting art or to keep in shape, but what we don't say is that the foundation of our martial arts dedication is stimulating our minds and bodies in a self-satisfying way because it makes us a better person. We don't say it perhaps because few of us have a venue to speak about these things. I do, so I said it for you. I hope I am representing us accurately.