

Rift, Harmony, and Attitude

So, I'm on Facebook, see, and an old friend from way back tells me that the President or the Speaker of the House or somebody who is running for some office is really, secretly, unbeknownst to the rest of the world, a pervert, a Communist, an autocrat, a liar, a thief, a crony capitalist, and/or has impolite table manners. My old friend from way back is, of course, entitled to his opinion. In a face-to-face societal interchange, I might politely disagree or choose to find another conversation in order to preserve the otherwise good friendship. That is, after all, what Facebook is supposedly wont to do. Communication, it is said, preserves relationships.

Although I disagree with my Facebook friend, I am not having a conversation, but an interchange of quips that will, no doubt end up with one of us (or a close associate of one of us) breaking into pseudo-swears and dissolving to the level of a logic puddle. It's not that I mind his having a different point of view—I accept that and perhaps can learn from it. What I mind is that he has expressed his point of view by posting a graphic from some sort of politically slanted website that claims to be perfectly objective, a fact that is evident because of the absurdity of the other side. In other words, the graphic conformed to his biases and will catch more attention from Facebook friends than will a reasoned argument, so What the #@&%^! He'll let the graphic speak for him.

Imagine a martial arts discussion, but instead of posted graphics from websites, the arguments are more like, "Because my totally objective, unbiased teacher, who happens to represent the ultimate martial art, says so." I actually had these discussions a few decades ago. They are called "arguments from authority", and if they function at all, it is because the guy's teacher has been doing martial arts for 50 years and you haven't. Now, if *your* teacher has been doing martial arts for 50 years and has an opposing point of view, you may be faced with finding another conversation in order to preserve the otherwise good friendship.

Novice martial artists cannot think about martial arts for themselves, and to the extent that the dojo emulates a military training hall, they should not think for themselves. But obedience to one's superiors, even on a military base, does not shut off one's brain; neither does obedience one's culture, religion, or political party. Similarly, obedience to one's sensei in class does not shut off one's brain. So the thinking martial artist keeps his opinions to himself until he has enough knowledge and experience to express them.

More senior martial artists not only have the time in grade (a.k.a. authority), but also have experienced enough simulated martial encounters to have an opinion based on facts, not someone else's bias. Ironically, as martial artists draw more closely together with group seminars, recognition societies, open tournaments, and multiple art exhibitions, the non-martial arts society

around them is separating into disparate chunks, each of which lets its most articulate graphics designer think for them.

For decades, I have been asking martial artists to learn lessons from the wider society. Now I think its time that the wider society learns a lesson or two from martial artists.