

# **The Subject of Self-control**

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Although achieving a rank without becoming conceited can be seen as a test of self-control in the martial arts, one's first test of self-control in a traditional school is the willingness to conform to the etiquette required. This etiquette, having to do with bowing to show respect, is often misunderstood by both non-traditional martial artists and Westerners in general. To the Asian, bowing is like the Western handshake or nod or wave. It is more formal and used more frequently, but bears a social similarity. Bows also are used to acknowledge that one is beginning an activity, to recognize one's training partner, to show respect to one's senior, and for various less important occurrences. To a traditional martial artist, bowing becomes so automatic, s/he may find her/himself doing it when walking into any place of authority or impressiveness, like a town hall or a library.

"I'll never be caught doing that silly junk," the non-traditionalist says. Ask yourself, however, if you would rather be in the company of people who outright refuse any deference or those who recognize that there are things more important than themselves.

Another aspect of self-control is the physical control of one's punches and kicks and the physical "support" of one's throwing partner. Some students disguise a lack of self-control by claiming that a little contact will make their partner tougher. In a good school, habitual lack of control is addressed with anything from a warning to a dismissal, but it is never tolerated. One's body control reflects one's mental control. A school cannot help people develop in positive ways if it tolerates those students who refuse the first requirement of that development. Lack of physical control is seldom a question of coordination and more often a question of attitude.

Control, as used in the martial arts, is beneficial limitation. It is not only a result of training, but also a prime training tool. One limits oneself to create a learning atmosphere that is challenging yet safe. Restricted triumph, like deferred gratification, is not only better for others, but indirectly for oneself as well.

Control is one of the "Five C's" of self-development along with Conditioning (mental and physical), Commitment, Courage and Civility. In fact, one could argue that is the root of the other four. Without self-control, one cannot stick with a conditioning or any training regimen; one therefore will not have any sort of commitment toward one's goals. Without self-control, one cannot face the challenges of attaining goals with courage nor deal civilly with others (especially those one finds unpleasant.)

If you visit a school that shows a lack of physical control that seems to be habitual rather than incidental, walk out. If you meet a practitioner who seems to care more about his rank, his speed, his power, his victories

than the quality of his training or what it has done to enhance his life, find out where he studies and avoid the entire neighborhood.

If, on the other hand, you find a school in which there are challenging and even potentially harmful exercises handled with caution and care for others, give it serious consideration as the school you want to make your own. If you meet a practitioner who seldom talks about his school, but does so with pride without bragging, find out where he trains and make an appointment to watch a class or two. This could be the place for you.