

To Control Violence, Face It

Many people get into martial arts because they want to “fear no man” as the old comic book ads used to say. They figure correctly that martial arts can make them tougher than they are. For that very reason other people are turned off by martial arts: they don’t want to be in the company of those who want to be tougher than the next dude. Unfortunately both groups confuse tough with rough. And some martial arts schools make the same mistake.

Actually, there are three mistakes here. Two of them have to do with definitions, the third with a comparison. (1) “Tough,” in my book, describes one who can take it without wimping out. (2) “Rough” is one who likes to dish it out. Roughnecks do not pick on toughnecks. No fun. Besides they may find they can be rough (dish it out), but don’t like having to be tough (take it). (3) Being tougher or rougher than the next dude is the third mistake. Martial arts, at least when applied as a traditional means of self-development, are not interested in beating every bad guy who puts on his spiked leathers. They are intended for the betterment of the person *compared to what he/she used to be*. Rather than being venues of violence, traditional schools are either temples of training or edifices of education or both.

Admittedly, there are those schools whose students fill the locker rooms with braggadocio about how they backed down some big guy at the bar last night. There are those schools whose training resembles fright night at a military boot camp. There are those schools that pair the more timid student with the least controlled intermediate as sparring partners just to make the timid tough. If you walk into one of these schools, walk out.

My hat is off to the “fear no man” types, even if they may see only a small aspect of traditional martial arts training. To their credit, they have been honest with themselves about a personal problem and have taken action to address it.

Those who find martial arts schools unsavory might be inarguably correct, or they might be among those guilty of lumping MacDonald’s with Chez Robért under the rubric “restaurant.”

Not all martial arts schools are the same. Some schools figure you want to be tough, that equates with rough, so they’ll train you hard. You’ll get bruised up and feel tougher, thinking you’re rougher as you continue to suffer. Other schools realize that to suffer may not equate with getting tougher. Sure, challenges are necessary, but to control violence we must face it, not become it!

Pacing is the important training device here. Everyone deals with their own self-development (which may include getting tougher) at their own pace. Their school has to challenge them, to be sure, but not too soon with too much at too great a physical cost. If training is to help the person realize his/her potential, it has to last a good long time. For it to last, it has to be a joy! Part of that joy is seeing results; part of it is to feel challenged in a secure environment.

I once read a few tidbits of wisdom regarding learning to fight. If you really want to learn to fight, so the wise man wrote, go to the local bar and spit in some big dude's beer. When you get back from the hospital, do it again. If you survive long enough, you'll be the roughest, toughest dude in the valley.

If this method does not appeal to you, either you don't really want to learn how to fight, or you are looking for self-development and self-defense rather than fighting experience. This means you are ready to face *controlled* violence in order to learn how to control violence. Sounds like traditional martial arts to me.

Next time, we discuss the secret motivation at the base of all martial arts training.