

## *The Use of Private Lessons*

There are two types of people who “use” private lessons in the martial arts: students and instructors. By this I mean the student uses the lesson to learn, the instructor uses the lesson to earn.

The student believes, with justification, that a private lesson will give him more attention from the instructor and thus he will learn more quickly. Private lessons can be five to ten times more expensive per hour than group lessons, so it is important that the instructor offer the attention that the student desires and deserves. Unfortunately, private lessons can be abused so that the student, although definitely getting his money’s worth during that hour, will be getting his money’s worth at no other time. Here is how some less than scrupulous instructors play the game.

“If you sign up for a two year contract, we will also include weekly private lessons for half-price.” Sounds good, doesn’t it? What you cannot see is that weekly private lesson were already included with a one-year contract and that half price of \$150/hour is about as much as the instructor would have charged anyone for a private lesson. You just paid for it in advance.

Some martial arts business systems include weekly private lessons at no additional charge which means you get private attention for 30 minutes per week at which time the assistant instructor makes you feel so good about yourself so that on the third week you are ready to “upgrade” your membership to the Bronze Dragon program. Eight to twelve weeks later, you will be praised into accepting the Silver Dragon program, and then the Gold, Platinum and Triple Uranium Dragon program — all at increased rates. So much for the \$50 per month special you started with.

Consider the true pluses and minuses of private lessons. Pluses: (1) personal attention, (2) often can be scheduled at your convenience. Minuses: (1) higher costs, (2) inability to work with a variety of students (different heights, weights and ability levels), (3) can’t be scheduled at your convenience, (4) instructor is unable to both criticize your technique and simultaneously be a partner for you, and (5) paying a premium for what you should have been getting in class anyway.

In many cases, group lessons are used to give the student a taxing workout and thus teach only a modicum of new material. Students are constrained from helping each other or tutoring their juniors because, as one instructor commented, “They would be taking my livelihood away!” Private lessons are where new material is taught. To advance, the student must take private lessons at a premium.

Fortunately, there are other ways to “use” both group and private lessons. Group lessons can be used for a rigorous work out and still have a portion of time reserved for new material and for breaking up into sub-groups to tutor this material, seniors helping juniors. If the instructor fears his livelihood is being taken away, he can’t have much material to teach in the first place. Private lessons are therefore relegated to voluntary *ad hoc*

classes that address some specific training problem or offer extra help. Private lessons are therefore scheduled only when desired.

New students, who want private instruction in a martial art (in lieu of any group instruction) without knowing the exact path that instruction is to take, are fooling themselves. There is only so much of a martial art you can learn from one-on-one instruction. At some point you have to integrate with other students. The martial arts, after all, are about controlling the relationship between attacker and defender; and attackers come in all shapes and sizes.

Private lessons can be a valuable tool in one's martial development, but should not be used to separate the student from his peers nor from his money.

*Next time, will investigate Experience as the Greatest Teacher.*