



TRADITIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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Kancho's Corner -

Why follow a Martial Way if it does not lead beyond the Dojo?

In the *I Ching* there is a character which reads as follows:

“After a time of decay comes the turning point. The powerful light that has been banished returns. There is movement, but it is not brought about by force ... the movement is natural, arising spontaneously. For this reason the transformation of the old becomes easy. The old is discarded and the new is introduced. Both measures accord with the time – therefore no harm results.”

All around us we see the signs of breakdown ... decay ... the symptoms are visible in our economics, social structures, environment, physical and mental health, employment models, education models, values, leadership. In fact it seems so big as to be unapproachable so most of us just shut it out. Quite rightly we concentrate on what we **can do**. I just believe that we **can do** more than we think, **when we act in concert!!**

Those symptoms we perceive are just that – they are not the illness – they are just a by-product.

What is the illness??

The illness is the way we think!!

This of course affects the way we act in everything. There is still an acceptance of outdated modes of thought. Linear rather than comprehensive; isolationist rather than systems; mechanistic rather than organic; competitive rather than complementary.

There is a separation between mind and the remainder of the human ... between human and human ... between human and planet ... between human and the other life forms. The models, which have sprung from this base, are flawed because they approach existence only from the intellectual.

How does Budo address this?? What good can it possibly do to go & train Budo a couple of times a week??

Budo teaches us to think correctly. It teaches us to think with our mind, body and spirit. I mean this absolutely

literally. It reintegrates the intellectual process with the emotional and the physical. Our human system is the supreme computer for running any theory through – we know what is right always if we are **open** – if we are UN-blocked of our prejudices and biases.

Having achieved a **Systems** view as individuals, we are then free to act in concert. That is the whole function of the Institute. To free each other and keep each other free while we act in concert - in concert we can have major impact on those problem areas I cited.

How do we act in concert – what models do we implement. Where do we uncover those models?

Look inside Budo!!

- Act in a Co-operative manner. Treat others as your partner – not your opponent.
- Avoid use of strength to overpower. Use the natural flow of power to mutual benefit.
- Treat others with genuine care.
- Enter without fear when needed – Blend with the force of others.
- Act to reconnect others. Avoid actions which separate or isolate.
- Deal with the problem – avoid personalising issues.
- Start with the basics and be aware that action in one area affects all other areas.
- Act when the time is right – Relax completely at times of inaction.
- Etc. Etc.

I vividly remember Nishioka Sensei telling me one thing over & over again in an early lesson – At first I found it quite annoying and a little voice kept going – “Why does he keep telling me the same thing over & over? I heard him the first time and I know this!!”

With a little thought the reason became clear and I was humbled. He kept telling me because I may have known it in my head but I wasn't doing it - **I wasn't living it out.**

Education is the means by which we can impact on the disease affecting the human race. Education in schools, in business, in politics, in economics, in environmental issues, in social planning, in health, in satisfying use of our time and energy (what are currently called employment and recreation). Education in Life!

David

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Member's Corner

FREE-SPARRING VS KATA



When David Sensei asked me if I'd like to write an article about my experiences in sword-based western martial arts and their comparison to my experiences in SMR Kenjutsu, I had to scratch my head for a time and think about what I could write about. I don't like to enter the "European vs Asian" debate, as I believe it is a pointless discussion. But I would like to touch on the subject of **free-sparring-based learning vs kata-based learning**.

I have to admit that when I first started training in SMR Kenjutsu, I had my reservations about the effectiveness of kata-based training. I had trained at a western martial arts school where the learning was predominantly based in controlled free-sparring, and the idea of kata was foreign to me. And let's be honest, to the untrained eye, kata can appear to be little more than a series of partnered movements more reminiscent of an armed dance than real combat.

However, as my understanding of the relationship between uchidachi and shidachi grew, and my awareness of the thought processes and intent behind the kata grew, I began to realize that kata-based learning actually addresses a large problem with free-sparring-based learning.

The problem with unarmoured free-sparring sword training is that it is impossible to free-spar using true combative distancing and speed or with any real intent. It is simply too dangerous in a modern setting. And the need to address modern safety concerns leads to a watering-down of the techniques and also a watering-down of the mindset of the student.

In my own personal experience as a beginning

Member's Corner Cont'd

student of European longsword, a great emphasis was placed on keeping myself safe, stepping well out of the way of my opponents attacks and so forth. As I became more experienced, I was encouraged to bring the combative distances in a little closer and I found it extremely difficult. The "safer" footwork was already ingrained in my muscles and I had begun to foster a mindset of self-preservation, rather than a mindset of cutting down my opponent.

I questioned my teacher as to why he taught this way, and his answer was that he couldn't have students swinging pieces of wood and steel at each other with anything near real intent, or at true combative speeds or distances. It was simply too dangerous in the unpredictable to and fro of free-sparring to actually execute techniques in their true form. This is a problem in my opinion. So how can you safely practice these dangerous techniques with weapons, whilst using correct distancing and speed? How do you develop a true combative mindset with a sword, without regular trips to the hospital for you and your training partners?

I'm beginning to realize that the answer lies in kata. It provides a great, safe framework for skills to be learned and honed and also grown upon. Just as importantly, it provides a framework from which it becomes possible to grow a true combative spirit and mindset. Since starting SMR Kenjutsu, I have been continually impressed by the level of depth behind the kata, from the subtle refinement of the footwork, to the way that the psychology of life-and-death combat is woven into the movements within the kata. And I think the mindset that is cultivated within SMR kenjutsu kata is one that is closer to the true spirit of the sword than the mindset from which I came. After all, do we draw swords to perpetually dance in circles with our opponent, playing it safe, giving ourselves few opportunities to be effective? Or do we draw swords to cut down our opponent within the space of a breath? So, I guess, despite my early reservations towards kata-based training, you could say I'm rapidly becoming a believer in it's effectiveness.

If anything, my experiences with SMR Kenjutsu kata have highlighted to me the shortcomings of free-sparring. However, I don't claim to be an expert on any of these matters. I'm just writing observations based on my own limited experience. Happy training!

Adam Stennett