

Seeking perfection of Martial Arts virtues

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The martial arts today are not what they once had been, nor are many of the students of them capable of understanding that our forefathers had much more intent when teaching them than just attainment of rank, fighting ability or showcase skills. In this article we will examine what is meant when one seeks true martial ability versus the modern “needs” and “desires” of most people who train in the arts.

Funakoshi Sensei, the founder of Shotokan Karate, was the first to include a moral set of guidelines into his training. There was little emphasis placed on actually training of the person to become the “ultimate warrior” in terms of fighting ability but rather more in become a warrior sage, or one of great nobility. His Dojo Kun is a staple of many schools throughout the world today and includes ideals all students, including masters, should strive for. He speaks of never attacking first, following the way of justice, releasing the mind, not becoming idle in your training, how long one must practice karate and about training not to lose versus training to win. There are more, but these are main concepts, or ideals that most true dojo instill within their students. It is also important to note that Funakoshi Sensei developed another set of ideals called the 20 precepts to teach his students that character of a martial artist is very important in their training.

Within the Japanese mindset of teaching the arts to students they include some very important precepts. These are to be guides to helping the student to live with integrity and honor, both of which are very important to the Bushi (warrior) class within the Japanese structure of society. They include Kansha (thankfulness), Makota (sincerity), Mokuteki (purpose), Shyuo (discipline), Sonkei (respect), Toitsu (unity). As a sensei these will be the hardest part of teaching your students, not because we all do not want them but rather because today’s society has forgotten these values or have manipulated them to become self serving. Many times your students will do what is necessary to earn rank and then go right back to the way the once were only to repeat the process once again when it serve them best. As a sensei it is up to you to seek the truth in your own manner of living and lead by example. You cannot change the character of your students but you can show them the way by living the ideals of what martial arts offers to them.

Most people today enroll in the martial arts with ideas of becoming a great fighter or to do the cool things they see on television, but they soon find out that in true Budo training these things have little place. A student is not respected for how good they are at fighting, but rather for perfecting the techniques. They are not awarded rank for how much they do but rather for how hard they train and the level of dedication to their Ryu, dojo and sensei has become. When people find out that they actually have to train for many years they often lose interest and soon become as the millions before them...another person who says “I used to take Karate but...”. If you are a good Sensei, a true martial art student and really want to learn the greatest amount of information on your chosen art then you must live by and seek to attain the ideals set forth that your Sensei has learned from his Sensei. This is called tradition, etiquette, honor and other names in the arts. Let’s examine some of these terms and what society labels as acceptable versus what the martial arts deem as worthy.

Kansha, or thankfulness is a term that society typically shrugs off. We simply state “thanks” when we feel the need to and this has become acceptable today, yet most children never say thank you even when given a gift! In Karate do the students are taught to thank the Sensei many times, in class, during testing and so forth. When you thank the Sensei you should do so with your deepest appreciation for what they are giving...part of their life...not just teaching you karate but imparting a section of their living soul out for the students. The next time you feel thankful say it from your heart and soul instead of just stating “Thanks”.

Makota is about being sincere. Most people today are not sincere in their purpose for doing things. They seek rewards for all they do instead of just doing something without possible attainment. Only the most sincere in the Karate world will be given the ultimate teachings. If one seeks reward for their hard work, or seeks to be complimented all the time, they will soon leave the true dojo. Karateka train with their heart and soul, void of seeking anything but true perfection of the techniques and deeper understanding of their given art form. If all students were truly sincere in their training then they would never complain about anything but understand this is a part of life.

Mokuteki is more about setting a purpose for your way of life. It is about having achievable goals and attaining them. Takanami Sensei used to always tell me that “when one throws a thousand punches with no other mokuteki in mind but to throw them, they will never perfect them. If one throws a thousand punches with each punch aimed at being better than the last they will eventually develop true mokuteki in their budo.” Society today teaches people that their entire purpose is to seek monetary gain so they can have material possessions. We have lost the true purpose in our lives once we delve down this path. This relates back to sincerity, or Makota.

Shyuo is perhaps the hardest principle of your training to master. Discipline in this form is not spoken of in terms of receiving it but rather to attain it. Sure you can get disciplined for being in trouble, not listening and all sorts of things...but that is not Shyuo! Shyuo means that you are disciplining yourself and doing what is right without regards for being rewarded for it. Kids today have very little discipline and parents who are enforcing rules are seen as harsh or overbearing. Society has come to accept certain behaviors as acceptable...most of which are quite often immoral or just plain wrong. Even our educational system is no longer designed to instill discipline in children. What kind of punishment is suspending a child? Putting them out of school is perhaps what they want...and they never learn from this. Unfortunately true Shyuo must be learned through receiving discipline from the Sensei and only at the time the student accepts and begins to discipline themselves will they gain true Shyuo.

Sonkei means to be reverent, or respectful of all things. This is the toughest part of learning the martial arts since respect is demanded from the Sensei and the lower ranks must earn the respect of the Sensei. Most people come into a dojo and want to be treated respectfully yet they often do not even understand the term, or its acceptable use. Society today places little emphasis on respect. Honestly I cannot blame them since even the leaders of this great country show why we should not respect them. Look at the scandals in our own politicians. How can one be a leader if they command respect but honestly have never earned that right? Society makes it acceptable to respect people based on what “click” they run with...when in reality people use these clicks for their own personal gain (see section

above on makota). Inside the dojo walls the biggest offense a student could ever do is to be disrespectful to their Sensei or Sempai (seniors in rank). I have witnessed students being thrown out of dojo for such offenses and even at our dojo this is still possible. Students who seek to challenge their Sensei are being disrespectful as well since they are the teacher and are freely giving you their attained knowledge. Over the many years I have trained I have watched it time and again. A student thinks they are good at Karate, better than Sensei, and they begin to go at it with him/her. The Sensei often sits back, relaxes and waits to see if you are going to calm down or if you are trying to show off. Regardless if the student does not take heed to the warnings given the Sensei has no choice but to kick your butt. This is hard on the Sensei since they truly care about their students...but if you deserve it they have been trained to give it to you...and they often do with dire consequences. Respect is placed above all other ideals in the martial arts and it is not just for the Sensei but for all things. A good Karateka will respect their dojo, their gi, their obi and the members of the Ryu understanding that if they are disrespectful it reflects directly back on to the Sensei and dojo.

Toitsu is about being a part of something larger than the self. When we interview people interested in learning the martial arts we will always ask them why they want to train. The answers are almost always the same and they all begin with "I want". As the student progresses in their training they soon realize that being a member of the Ryu is not about the "I want" scenario but rather the "What can I" scenario. In society today it is all about the self. Children are trained this from an early age since they often "want" something and are often "given" it by parents, grandparents or even friends. If they do not get what they "wanted" they throw a fit and rather than discipline the child...the parents give in because of many reasons. This has taught our future leaders that if they do not get their way it is ok to "throw a fit" or just plain quit something. When it comes to the dojo and true Budo training we will lose more students to this than anything else because they are, well honestly...SELFISH. All they care about is what serves their interest. These students are singled out quite quickly and often do not last in a traditional dojo since true Karateka understand it is about the Ryu development more than the self. When a Sensei makes something mandatory there is quite often a reason for this. It is funny how only around 60% on a good day every show up to support a function and respect the Ryu. The other 40% of students always have some sort of "excuse" which is direct violation of all these principles.

Since we have discussed these views of the martial arts ideals versus what has become acceptable in society it is more apparent why the martial arts should be used in our educational system and only good, traditional schools with qualified Sensei should ever be chosen for your or your child's lessons. The funniest part of all this is that no matter what we write, quote, teach, strive for or attempt to instill in our students once we try and teach them something that they may not want to do, or agree with...they quit. They quit thinking they will teach us something...yet here we are, still teaching the ideals and not bending our ways because we know it works and we live what we teach others...something the quitter will never learn because they are selfish.