

Reflections On Martial Arts Studies

By Michael Sullenger

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Decades of Martial Arts Training

Preface

In March 1990 I submitted a paper to Mr. Lieb (our AKS founder and chief instructor) in partial fulfillment of my sixth degree black belt requirements. The points I made at that time are still relevant today. My friend and mentor suggested I update and share the paper with the American Karate System's membership, as well as other true students of the arts. I hope the thoughts and reflections that follow will have a positive impact on your personal perspective regarding the martial arts, and your specific studies in karate.

Introduction

While talking with two of my newest students a few years ago, I discussed with them various experiences I'd had throughout my years in the Martial Arts. I was attempting to help them understand certain techniques and movements I had worked hard to learn by myself, as well as others I had picked up from someone of a higher rank and several more years of training. What follows is an attempt to set words to paper with respect to my experiences and studies of the Martial Arts over a period which covers nearly five decades. The purpose is to share as well as reflect on both the feelings and motivations that prompted me, and most people, to begin studying some form of the arts. As one's skill and awareness increase over a period of several years, so also does one's philosophical perspective.

For purposes of this paper, the term "Martial Arts" will be used because of its all encompassing definition. The more time people spend studying Martial Arts, the greater the chances are they will, through the strains of both physical and mental endeavors, see the true essence of what it means to be one with the Universe. I used the word "chances" because as with many things in life, the light fails to turn on for some people. This could be due to no fault of their own or with the manner in which they train. This understanding (or knowledge) is something that must be sought by people in their own way. The results they achieve or fail to achieve will be a manifestation of their own personal goals and efforts.

To further illustrate the point of enlightenment, the following quote from Shigeru Egami's book, *The Way of Karate, Beyond Technique*, is provided for your review. In the preface of his book, Egami discusses how the practice of karate has changed over the years with respect to technique, but not with respect to its ultimate goal:

The ideal of Gichin Funakoshi, who has come to be recognized as the 'Father of Karate-do' was to advance from JUTSU (technique) to DO (the way). It became my mission to realize this ideal, but here again questions arise: What is the meaning of 'from technique to the way?' Through what kind of practice can one attain this ideal? Karate-jutsu or karate-do? The distinction between the two must be clearly grasped. Karate-jutsu must be regarded as nothing more than a technique for homicide and that most emphatically, is not the objective of Karate-do. He who would follow the way of true karate must seek not only to coexist with his opponent but to achieve unity with him. There is no question of homicide, nor should emphasis ever be placed on winning. When practicing Karate-do, what is important is to be one with your partner, move together, and make progress together." (Pages 9 & 10)

An additional point required here is the difference between training and studying. Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary defines the two words as follows: "Study – The act of studying; the pursuit of knowledge, as by reading, observation, or research." "Training – a. To coach in or accustom to a mode of behavior or performance; and b. To prepare physically, as with a regimen." I wish to point out the differences between these two words. In the beginning we train. We are taught by an instructor who puts us through continuous physical exercises to develop our abilities to kick, block, punch and move in the proper manner. When we arrive at a point where mere training is not satisfying our desire to learn, we begin to study. It is the combination of these two endeavors that will bring the student of the Martial Arts to enlightenment. Also by studying the writings of various martial arts founders and masters, a person develops an even deeper understanding. Case in point is Funakoshi's second precept (of the twenty he espoused in *Karate-do Niju kaju*): *Karate ni senti nashi* means there is no first strike in karate. What do you think Funakoshi meant by that?

In The Beginning

When I first became interested in learning the Martial Arts, it was purely for the selfish reason of being able to save my own bacon. If someone were to take a disliking to me, and decided he wanted to rearrange my looks, I wanted to have the capability to escape with minimal damage. As attempts at this had already occurred on several occasions, I was very motivated.

During the early 1960's, I lived in the small southwestern Indiana town of Vincennes where no classes in the Martial Arts were available. I was able to talk a neighbor's son-in-law, an Army paratrooper, into teaching me what he'd learned in the Army and on his own. I also worked hard at getting my hands on any and every piece of printed material about the Martial Arts at our local library. As time went by, I came across one or two others who had received formal training in some form of Martial Art and persuaded them to teach me what they knew.

This went on until 1964 when the local junior college (Vincennes University) offered Tae Kwon Do classes. The classes were taught by a newly discharged airman who had finished his last tour of duty with the Air Force in Korea where he studied Chun Do Kwan Tae Soo Do and earned his first degree black belt. I joined the classes even though I was the only high school member. Many of the college students with whom I was training resented my presence. They attempted to get me to drop out by using both verbal and physical harassment. Of all the original students of that first class, I am the only one still active in the Martial Arts to this day, to the best of my knowledge.

After graduating from high school and joining the United States' Air Force, I was stationed at Sheppard Air Force Base (AFB) in Wichita Falls, Texas, following my basic training in San Antonio's Lackland AFB. I continued my studies with Technical Sergeant Allen in the same system I had begun at the junior college, Chun Do Kwan Tae Soo Do. My first teacher, Mr. Dennis Callahan, had impressed upon me the need to avoid fighting whenever possible. When leaving the scene to avoid trouble wasn't possible, his advice was to strike quickly and disappear. I observed him follow this philosophy at a dance one weekend at a club called

Lamey's Lounge a few miles outside of Evansville, Indiana, on highway 41. He had danced with a young lady who had a jealous boyfriend who found out what happened and came looking for Dennis. Dennis was unaware of what was going on until the boyfriend, accompanied by a small crowd of onlookers, confronted him. Dennis was unable to pacify the boyfriend because he had too many of his friends watching. When it became clear he wasn't going to talk his way out of a fight, Dennis hit the guy with a well placed and well controlled spear finger thrust in the throat. The irate boyfriend grabbed his throat, coughing and acting as though he had something lodged in it. During the confusion, Dennis and I slipped out and left the dance.

Sergeant Allen had a similar way of looking at things. He said, "If you get into a situation where you try your best to get away peacefully and it doesn't work, then the best defense is a good offense."

During the same time I was studying with Sergeant Allen, I also traveled on weekends to Dallas and trained at the Hillcrest Karate Institute owned by Allen Steen. The instructor in charge of the school was Fred Wren. This was my first occasion to come in contact with someone who truly enjoyed inflicting pain, or so it seemed to me at the time. Whenever Fred would demonstrate a technique, move, or free spar with one of the students, the student would invariably get hurt. Wren never displayed any remorse or concern. When I saw the movie "The Karate Kid," the instructor who ran the Kobu Kai School and taught the students to "show no mercy," I was reminded of Fred Wren.

Realization of Potential

I hadn't really come to appreciate the potential of what I'd been learning until an incident occurred during my vacation in the summer of 1967. While visiting my mother in Indianapolis, I went out for a hamburger with my brother and his friend. We went to a White Castle on Keystone and 38th Street where you could eat ten hamburgers for a dollar. When we pulled into the parking lot we passed a car full of high school seniors celebrating their graduation. They didn't bother us when we went in, but when we came out they began saying lots of dirty things. I told my brother and his friend to ignore them, because nothing would be accomplished by

fighting. As we began pulling out of the parking lot, a couple of them started kicking my car. That cut it! I stopped the car and told the other two to do their best. When I exited the car, there were three of them waiting on me. Their movements appeared to be in slow motion. When I hit them it seemed as if I had barely touched them, even though they went down either screaming in pain or unconscious. We all took off when we heard the wail of police sirens in the distance. This event replayed in my mind's eye for months. I was amazed at what I'd been able to do and the effect of my actions. I can remember always wondering if the techniques I'd been learning were really effective. That evening's event put an end to my wonderings. There were no more doubts in my mind about the significance or effectiveness of what I was learning. It also brought to my understanding Funakoshi's second precept of *Karate Ni Senti Nashi* – there is no first strike in karate. Egami Sensei also quotes a similar comment by his teacher in his book where he points out that “*there is no offense in karate*” (Egami, *The Way of Karate, Beyond Technique*, p. 15). As a person advances in his abilities, he begins to see how to blend with the opponent, rather than meeting them head on. One can cause a great deal of damage by merely moving out of the path of an attacker and using the opponent's own momentum against him.

Continuing to Learn

My enlistment in the Air Force took me from Texas to southern Spain. In Spain I started teaching at a Judo school in the city of Sevilla, where my new bride Janie and I were renting an apartment. We'd gotten married just prior to departing for our new assignment. Other than Judo the people there had had little to no exposure to any of the other Martial Art. Janie and I enjoyed traveling and seeing the sights. On our first trip to Madrid I met Mr. Kim and Mr. Cho, two Koreans who ran their own karate school. I continued my studies with these two gentlemen during the few years we were stationed in Spain. I traveled to Madrid once every two months as time and money would permit. My training with them was tough. I usually arrived on a Friday and trained in the afternoon and evening. On Saturday at 6 A.M., some of the hardier students met at the school with one of the Korean instructors. We began running up the hill through the park, jumping over benches and dodging each other as the front runner would turn and attack those behind him. Once he got to the end of the file, he would bring up the rear. This continued until the instructor was back in front again. After about two miles, we arrived back in the school

parking lot where we formed a circle and began stretching. In this circle we practiced various techniques and took turns in the middle sparring with those who would attack us from different directions. I also attended an afternoon class and another in the evening that same day. Later that night I would catch the train back to Sevilla. I would show up at work on Mondays following a trip to Madrid with both of my shins and forearms covered in bruises. To this end Sensei Egami states, *“In a sense, practice, whether done alone or in a group, is a battle against one’s own self. There is a strong temptation to be lazy and practice leisurely. One should not be lazy; one should learn how to accept hard practice. One should not think of practice as a fight against an opponent. He should challenge the extreme limits of his own strength”* (p. 108).

These two Koreans taught me how to develop a mental toughness I had previously not been forced to learn. They helped me see in myself abilities I had only previously believed others had. I remember Dennis Callahan once telling me when I had been trying to do a jump kick, “Elephants don’t fly.” Now, at 5’ 10” and 200 pounds I’m no lightweight. That doesn’t mean it was impossible to learn how to do jump kicks if I put my mind to it. Through hard work and development of my muscles, as well as the appropriate mental outlook, I was able to realize some half way decent jump kicks. I was also able to become more flexible than I ever dreamed possible. This further helped to mold my mental attitude. The point is that a person’s desire, mental openness, and attitude are the key factors between success and failure in life. After all, life is only a series of trial and error experiences that help us learn to deal with reality on a day-by-day basis. Likewise is the study of the Martial Arts. Only through experiencing and striving to learn the many techniques can we achieve the ability to progress up the ladder towards final success. Coupled with the forward movement towards success is the overall development of the person. This development, as Sensei Egami puts it, occurs at the same time. First he says, *“Beginning in the training of one’s body, practice continues with the training of one’s spirit. Finally one realizes that body and spirit are not two things but one. This is true practice.”* (p. 15) Later Sensei Egami states, *“The body and spirit are fundamentally one. If you train your body, your spirit will also be trained”* (p.100). As you can see, the importance of both physical and mental preparation will occur at the same time and are of equal importance toward one’s overall development. It’s also through these same efforts you begin to transition from mere training to study.

Tournaments

As a student of karate and an early subscriber of *Black Belt* magazine, I began my exposure to competition. My first tournament was in May 1966 at Jhonn Rhee's Nationals in Washington D.C. I competed as an orange belt and won my first three matches. I believe this was also the tournament where Joe Lewis made his debut and won the black belt portion of the competition. There were some good fights and some bad ones. There was also good and bad judging. This resulted in several people getting their noses bloodied, teeth loosened or knocked out, and their faces cut, requiring stitches. During this period of karate competition, hand and foot protection, like the variety in use today, was nonexistent. Maybe Mr. Rhee realized a need for protective gear because of the injuries that occurred at his tournament. He invented the first pieces of safety equipment (1972/73) that spawned the industry that exists today providing competitors with a variety of hand, feet, head and body gear they can wear to protect themselves.

As an enlisted man in the Air Force, I participated in one tournament as a green belt and two as a brown belt prior to going overseas to Spain. As a green belt, I participated in a tournament in Oklahoma City presented by Jack Hwang, a noted Korean instructor and promoter. I won several matches at this competition and ended up in 4th place. As a brown belt, I competed in the first and second Armed Forces Karate Championships held at Ft. Bliss in El Paso and Sheppard AFB in Texas respectively. In El Paso I injured my right leg when an opponent and I clashed legs trying to execute the same kick. At the Sheppard AFB tournament I fought the guy who'd taken first place in El Paso. The base newspaper talked about our match being one of the best of the entire event. We fought through regulation time, two overtimes, and finally a sudden death, where he beat me by a point. I felt pretty good about this as he was a 2nd degree black belt who had studied several years in Japan, and I was only a 1st grade brown belt. You may wonder why a brown belt would fight a black belt. The Japan Karate Association of America, headed by Hiditaka Nishiyama, ran the Armed Forces Tournaments. Their method of competition was to have brown and black belts fight in the same division. There were no separate divisions for brown and black belts. Sensei Nishiyama was a well respected senior member of the Shotokan organization and former student of its founder, Gichin Funakoshi. It was after this tournament

that Sergeant Allen promoted me to first degree black belt (1st Dan). Wow, what a feeling of accomplishment!

It may be helpful for the reader to understand the levels of rank used in various martial arts systems. When students begin their studies, they start at the 10th Kyu (grade) White belt level. The progression upwards varies depending on the style and/or school at which they study. As a rule, students move from white to yellow or orange, then green and blue, and finally brown. In other words, the students start at the 10th Kyu level and reach the 1st Kyu level before becoming eligible for black belt rank. Once a student earns his 1st Dan black belt, they begin to progress up the ladder towards 10th Dan, depending on how long they continue to study. Few students attain this highest level because it has traditionally been reserved for instructors who've had unique insights and talents that lead them to create their own system or style of martial art, like my teacher and mentor Ernie Lieb. For students to arrive at a level between 6th Dan and 9th Dan is a great accomplishment if their system places the emphasis on requirements deemed proper for such ranks. Sadly, in the U.S. there are many martial artists whose only goal is rank. Many don't really earn what they eventually claim. They either work under some other instructor whom they pay to receive higher rank, or they start their own martial arts organization so they could promote themselves and likeminded friends. This pretentious mode of self promotion has resulted in martial artists in other parts of the world looking at Americans and American martial artists as a bunch of clowns who aren't serious students of the arts.

When I returned from Spain to the U.S. in October of 1970, I had just earned my 2nd Dan. I continued to follow the tournament scene via *Black Belt* magazine while stationed overseas. I was anxious to try my hand as a black belt. Without beleaguering you with accounts of my many tournament stories, suffice it to say I was able to pick up some 40 plus trophies. For every trophy won, there were at least 10 competitions where I got stomped; most of the time it was by better competitors. However, there were times it was due to poor officiating and/or politics. I realize 40 or so trophies are not a lot in comparison to many others who went to tournaments practically every weekend. My interests lie not so much in competition, but in the desire to learn more about other aspects of the many systems that make up the Martial Arts. Tournament

competition was one part of my martial arts training that helped to build my confidence in different areas.

In high school I never participated in sports to any degree. Not being a “jock” meant not being with the “in crowd” or wearing a letter jacket or sweater. There is a certain kind of self-confidence that results from winning in Martial Arts competition. I was no one really great, though I got mentioned once in *Black Belt* magazine by one of their correspondents as an unknown newcomer. I was also told by others that I had excellent potential to be one of the top rated competitors in the nation. I did manage a rating as the top Kata competitor in the American Karate System for the 1973-1974 time frames; and the number two guy in the American Karate Association. There were times when I would leave a tournament with first place in kata and first, second or third in heavyweight sparring. It was a good feeling to win knowing you’d done your best and were judged fairly among the many other good martial artists who competed.

Tournament competition is also a great way to find out how well your training has prepared you. You’ll come up against many talented people when you compete. Unfortunately, there are just as many problems that occur at tournaments that cause competitors a great deal of heartbreak and frustration. If competition is kept in perspective and not made to be the panacea (cure-all) for all that the Martial Arts stands for, then the student has an excellent chance of seeing the big picture. It’s this big picture from which enlightenment comes. It is as much from within us as it is from outside. Again, my interests lie not in seeing if I was the best fighter or kata competitor, but in broadening my intellectual horizons in the Martial Arts and my understanding of myself. It has also been in teaching others and in developing me as a person.

Commercialism vs. Traditionalism

Over the past forty-nine years I’ve had the opportunity to visit and train in a number of schools across the nation and overseas. Some schools were purely commercial. The people who ran them made their living by getting as many paying students through their doors as possible. Other schools were located in YMCA’s, churches and community or recreation centers. These schools were more interested in teaching their style, so the student’s perspective was more in line with

the Asian way of thinking. One commercial school with which I developed an ongoing relationship is located in McAllen, Texas. The owner and head instructor, David Borowitz, works at instilling a proper mindset in his students while still making a living from fulltime instruction. He tries to not sacrifice the quality of the instruction or the importance of earning rank, like some of the other commercial schools in the area. I'm sure there are other such schools located throughout the U.S.

Overseas the dojos were more along the lines of clubs than commercial schools, though there were a number of them whose instructors also earned a living from fulltime teaching. It didn't appear, from what I saw in Europe of the schools I visited or trained in, that they were as consumed by generating profits as many of their American counterparts. The key difference here is where one draws the line between quantity and quality. My experience has shown me that the biggest violators of quantity over quality are the Koreans. Let me also say I have known some really good Korean instructors whose main objective was turning out good students as well as generating funds. There are also a lot of good commercial schools with solid traditional values.

Commercialism has its place if approached properly. Students should not be produced in assembly line fashion from white to black belt as soon as they know the techniques and movements, purely for generating funds as quickly as possible. This does a great disservice to the students, as well as the Martial Arts community. Nearly everyone has heard a joke or story about the guy who in the heat of an argument jumps back into a karate stance while announcing he either knows karate, or has a black belt. The other guy, totally unimpressed responds, "yeah, well I know tire iron," and commences to put lumps on the other's head. When instructors who haven't received proper training and instruction run schools, the result is poorly taught students in the majority of cases. During a tournament in Edinburg, Texas, I was the center referee in a ring of advance level (under black belt) teens. During one match, the young man who won hit the other on two different occasions with no intention of using even the smallest amount of control. After warning him the first time, I gave his opponent a point when he hit the other boy again with no control. Even though he won the match, his brother, a black belt with the same school, argued with me saying it didn't matter how much contact there was. A point was a point.

I admonished him for his lack of respect and poor attitude. I was told later he was making faces at me behind my back. The instructor of these two youths was totally responsible for their lack of respect and sportsmanship. Even though I confronted him about it, I doubt seriously he cared. I again was reminded of the movie “The Karate Kid,” in which the instructor of the Kobu Kai School teaches his students to show no mercy. His students reflected his bad attitude and poor sportsmanship to the letter. I also have it on good authority this same instructor, now an 8th Dan, wasn’t even a black belt 20 years prior. I earned my 1st Dan in May 1968 and my 8th Dan in June 2005. Though this example speaks less of commercialism, it does illustrate (sadly) where some so called students of the arts heads really are. They are the kinds of martial artists the European’s call clowns. For them it’s more about image and ego than anything else; as a result these instructors’ turnout students who are their mirror image.

Commercialism also seems to promote a larger number of young students to the rank of black belt. Go to any of a number of karate or Tae Kwon Do schools and you’ll have no trouble finding boys and girls 7 and 8 years of age wearing a black belt. One of the key positions and philosophies we in the American Karate System have had since our inception has been to not promote kids to black belt. We feel they must mature enough to understand the significance and importance of the rank. We set seventeen as the age at which some level of maturity should exist enough to understand and appreciate the significance of the rank they have achieved. That includes knowing how they should conduct themselves in a given situation, thus ensuring (as best one can) they won’t abuse or misuse these skills. When abuse of skills takes place it results in a poor misrepresentation of the arts and the student’s true training.

This is an area (outside of commercial influences) where more traditionally minded teachers can have a profound impact. The study and training of the Martial Arts should emphasize the goal of developing the person into a more productive and responsible member of society, not just another number on a list of students who attained the rank of black belt about which the head instructor can brag. The main reason a qualified black belt begins to teach others is to pass on to them what he has learned. With proper training the student’s development is always along positive lines. Unfortunately, many people who get involved in the Martial Arts haven’t done well elsewhere in life. Consequently, people have found an area where they have been able to

succeed to some extent. They use this as their avenue to gain the limelight. Anyone who has been to a few tournaments will know exactly what I mean. The Martial Arts is the only area I've come across where a great number of egotists exist. There is nothing wrong with having a somewhat inflated ego, if it's kept in check and in perspective. When it's not, you have instructors and their assistants who provide the wrong example for their students. If a student scores a point on this type of person during a sparring session, he will likely beat the poor kid into the ground. His ego won't permit him to be seen as anything but invincible. If a pretty girl walks into the school, the egotist immediately begins to show his stuff. Girls are not exempt from this either. In their case it may revolve more around chasing the instructor than trying to demonstrate invincibility.

So where does this put us in regards to commercial schools and noncommercial ones? It requires an approach that looks at what the motivating factors are for a black belt to open a school. It requires an understanding of this person's background and legitimacy as it pertains to how he or she got a black belt. What are their qualifications? How much time have they spent training? To what degree and depth have they studied Martial Arts history and philosophy? These are some areas that can be used as a jumping off point in developing a clear view of the individual's qualifications to teach others. One of the biggest problems in the United States today is the lack of organized control be it local, state or federal, towards the goal of licensing instructors. This would be a crucial step in providing a means of verification that an instructor possesses the minimum requirements and qualifications necessary to teach. Without this control it's a wide-open ballgame in which anyone can play. There are no rules or guidelines to govern who does what to whom. The result is a lot of misled and cheated students who sought instruction, only to be taken to the cleaners by a smart con man, or those students who received instructions from someone completely lacking the qualifications. There are hundreds of quality schools and teachers throughout the U.S. today. A person wishing to learn a particular style or art need only take the time to visit a variety of them and observe how their classes are run. By observing their classes and asking pointed and well structured questions, a person will soon see what the instructor's goals are. Also talking with some of the students will help in shedding additional light on what makes this school successful.

Final Thoughts

I've been a part of the American Karate System (AKS) since 1972 and a student of the arts in general since 1960. I liked what Mr. Lieb was doing then, as I do now. We're not constrained by traditional guidelines for the most part, though we conduct ourselves as traditionalists in many ways. While other schools might not entertain change, the AKS looks to improve wherever possible. There are a few areas where we too need to evaluate our techniques and direction. These areas will eventually be taken care of, not hidden or swept under the carpet, as some systems do to keep from disturbing so called traditionalistic values.

Our system is the first truly American one to date. Now you ask, "How can there be an American system of karate?" A system or style of Martial Art does not have to originate from an oriental country. Over the centuries, many ways of fighting and defense, with and without weapons, have come and gone, but many are still with us today. If a person studies the histories of the many prominent styles of karate today, he will find these styles came into being during the last century. So, why shouldn't there be an American style of karate? The AKS uses the main oriental systems and philosophies as its foundational corner stones. This includes six of our under black belt katas, which are taken from three of the main countries where various styles evolved. Like these other countries America has had its forms of fighting and has evolved over the years. This evolution has been the result of Americans learning other fighting arts while living in the orient. In addition Americans have learned from Orientals who have come to our country with their arts to teach us.

The AKS requires its students and instructors to conform to rigid requirements in training, testing and attitude, both in and out of the school environment. This parallels other oriental systems in many respects and surpasses them in others. Our black belts must physically test through 6th Dan. Most other styles only test through 4th or 5th Dan levels. I could go on with additional rationale and justifications about why the AKS is so good, as well as being a legitimate style. This is not to say, as some are fond of doing, that my system is the best. No one style is worse or better than any other. The individual who represents his respective art is the one who either does a good or bad job of portraying what his system can or cannot do.

When I became a student of Mr. Lieb and the AKS, I was working on my 3rd Dan with a Korean instructor. I'd learned one set of forms for my 1st Dan and a second set for my 2nd Dan. When I got back to the States I was told I would have to learn another new set of katas before I could test for 3rd Dan. It gave me the impression the Korean's were having trouble deciding on what to do and which forms were best. You would have thought after centuries of martial history they would have gotten a handle on that already. I'd been in the Korean system some ten years, yet I never felt like anything more than just a student. While a student under some of my Korean instructors, there were times I was the one teaching the classes. There were also times where I felt there was a great deal of respect missing, not to mention the impression of being more of a dollar sign than a black belt assistant instructor. I don't mean this to sound bitter, but I expect more from the senior instructor than just instruction. As in any organization, loyalty, friendship and trust must be earned and given in both directions.

For me the study of karate was more than just learning how to kick and punch. It was becoming part of something that has a rich history, even though many cultures are involved. The self-discipline and desire to acquire the capabilities and knowledge demonstrated by Orientals were to be admired. True study of the arts meant accepting it as a way of life. American students tend to be lazy, afraid of a little work, and impatient for results. It's good to ask questions in order to improve one's understanding. It's also important to follow instructions without questioning them as well. A student must trust his teacher to provide him in his learning environment with both physical and intellectual instruction. Obviously, his teacher must be qualified enough to provide the appropriate level and depth of instruction, based on the level and ability of the student. The student must also know when to ask questions and when to pay attention and work. American students also give up too easily, or become bored and want to move on to something else. If things start to get difficult, quitting seems to be the easiest way out. In fairness to Americans I was told by a Shotokan friend of mine, Ariel Lim, when he started training in the Philippines there were 500 students. When he tested for his black belt five years later there were only seven. The point is not everyone is cut out for the training or life style. Those who become successful in the martial arts have a much higher likelihood of being successful in life as well.

Recommendations

If you are a student of the Martial Arts, or desire to become one, examine your reason and resolve. Search your mind and your heart for the true reason and don't start with any misgivings. Know that your studies will take years. Understand the key to success requires patience and perseverance. Though the end results tend to be a long way down the road, they are well worth working for. I have come to the point where I am comfortable with who I am and what my abilities and inabilities are. I have no illusions of being anything more than I am. I seek no higher goals than continuing to be one with my environment and my society. My joy is in seeing the light in the eyes of a student to whom I have just shown or explained something they have grasped. I have nothing to prove to anyone save myself, for it is only my God and myself I must please and serve. By helping students understand movements and/or principles, I have earned rewards for which there is no monetary equivalence. Being there for someone who is having problems for which they feel no escape also provides fulfillment. What each person must do in his or her own mind is to plot a path and travel it. We are the sowers of our own seeds and must stand ready to reap the results, be they good or bad.

In Gichin Funakoshi's autobiography, *Karate-Do, My Way Of Life*, he writes,

A Japanese actively seeking self-enlightenment will say that he is "training his stomach" (hara wo neru). Although the expression has wide implications, its origin lies in the obvious necessity to harden the muscles of the stomach, a prerequisite for the practice of karate, which is after all, a combat technique. By bringing the stomach muscles to a state of perfection, a karateka is able to control not only the movements of his hands and feet, but also his breathing. (P. viii)

The practice of karate, or any Martial Art, requires dedication. The dual meaning behind Funakoshi's discussion of *hara wo neru* was first the literal meaning of the toughening of the stomach. The second more philosophical one was to train and develop our minds and bodies. By approaching our training from the latter, we then seek to arrive at a point of self-enlightenment. To some that would be the point where we become totally comfortable with who we are, and what our capabilities and inabilities are. Also, the study of the Martial Arts requires

courtesy, respect and sincerity be given and received by all. This is also a good point Sensei Egami made in his book. He said, *“He who could follow the way of karate must be courteous, not only in training but in daily life. While humble and gentle, he should never be servile. His performance of the kata should reflect boldness and confidence. This seemingly paradoxical combination of boldness and gentleness leads ultimately to harmony. It is true, as Master Funakoshi used to say, that the spirit of karate would be lost without courtesy.”* (P. 18)

The one movement that best reflects this attitude is taught the very first day a person begins his studies. It encompasses respect, courtesy, humility and sincerity. Yet, people are concerned they aren't doing it right. You're wondering what movement could embody so much. It is the simple bow. Sensei Egami puts it very nicely. *“Without sincerity, the bow is meaningless. Rather than be concerned about its outward appearance, put your heart and soul into the bow, then it will naturally take on a good shape.”* (P. 18) As with all things one endeavors to accomplish in life, the results are always better when we have put our hearts and souls into the effort, with sincerity, courtesy, and respect. The efforts merit the results.

Memoriam

On September 22, 2006, my dear friend, teacher, and mentor of more than 33 years was tragically killed in Lathen, Germany. Ernie was traveling with Chuck Krum, affectionately known to all as Sergeant Pepper, and two of our German members. They were riding on an experimental train that struck a maintenance car. Along with our members there were 21 others who died.

Over the past decade Ernie had discussed with me and several of the other senior black belts his desires for leadership and control of the AKS in the event he was no longer with us. All of us figured this wouldn't be anything we'd really need to concern ourselves with. Ernie was getting more into the development and building of the AKS as time went along. His yearly trips to Germany to conduct seminars, coupled with his efforts at home, had helped to focus his energies. He saw a bright future for the AKS and was enthusiastic. I remember jokingly telling him he would probably out live most of us.

Part of Ernie's concerns was the survival of his beloved organization. The examples left by what had happened to Ed Parker's International Kempo Karate organization, and Robert Trias' United States Karate Association after their deaths remained ever present in Ernie's mind. The organizations those two pioneers of American karate built fell into disunity after their respective deaths because of petty squabbles and large egos among the senior black belts. The senior students of these two great men could not come together regarding who the leader of their respective organizations should be. The end result was both organizations became fragmented and broke into smaller groups. The legacies of these two great pioneers were lost in the dust of the power struggles that ensued following their passing.

To Mr. Lieb's credit he had already taken steps to let his senior black belts know who he wanted to take over as the chief instructor in the event of his death. After his funeral on October 4, 2006 I was named his successor. During our first summer camp, without our beloved leader and friend, my succession was formalized with my promotion to 9th Dan.

In reflecting back over the years I've been training and studying the martial arts, I never once imagined ever arriving at the rank I now hold, or being responsible for the leadership of an international organization. Thankfully I am surrounded by senior black belts who share the same vision and goals. During the black belt meeting it became clear those present were unanimous in their desire to see the dream and legacy of our founder continued. They voiced their collective trust in our two assistant chief instructors (Fred Reinecke and Dave Thomas) and in your humble correspondent.

The tragic and sudden loss of our founder and friend left a large void in our hearts and the training halls that make up the American Karate System. What remains is what he instilled in all of us who were privileged to train under him. Many of us were all honored by his enduring friendship. He taught us the importance of treating all students with kindness, humility, and patience. He taught us to be competitive but always good sportsmen. He emphasized the need to learn from other styles while willingly sharing. Most importantly he taught us that the person who represents their respective styles either does it honor or shame; inferring that all styles have

both good and bad aspects. The challenge is to adopt the good and leave the bad behind if it can't be improved on.

The above ideals can best be summed up by the following creed:

American Karate System Mission Statement

The goals and mission of the American Karate System continue the dream and legacy of its founder Ernest H. Lieb. It is our pledge to accomplish this by adhering to the following:

1. Strive for excellence in training and the conduct of your personal life.
2. Foster the technical, mental, and personal development of AKS members.
3. Maintain traditional ideologies while approaching training from an eclectic point of view.
4. Teach effective techniques, tactics and strategies for self-defense; and/or defense of the helpless, while educating the public about the true nature of the martial arts.
5. Represent the AKS with dignity, honor and integrity at all times.
6. Espouse the noble virtues of humility and honor in training and social interaction whether in public or in private.
7. Participate in competition with sportsmanship.
8. Promote open engagement and mutual sharing of martial art training experiences with members of other styles and organizations.

As members of the American Karate System we should all strive to be the best we can, while helping each other in whatever way possible. What we do must not be based on greed or any desire for self gratification beyond our own improvement, and that of our fellow members.

Respectfully yours in Budo,

Michael A. Sullenger, 9th Dan
Chief Instructor
American Karate System
Major, USAF Retired

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