

View from the Dojo

Student or Teacher

Are you a student or a teacher? The answer should be, yes. We should never stop studying and learning. Even if I had perfect technique, I'd have to constantly work in order to deal with my ever-changing body. That aside, I have seen very few, even approaching perfection, so most of us have plenty of work to do in becoming adequate. Knowing all of the required kata does not make one a Yudansha. Knowing the kata gives you a vehicle with which you can practice your moves, and learn to apply the principles of Wado. These principles should be learned and practiced throughout your training. The best "students" in class should be the advanced students and the instructors, because they understand the Wado principles enough to know how much there is to know, and how much work is needed to develop these principles, and make them a part of their natural movement. The most important things you need to learn in the martial arts were taught to you in your first month of training. They were also taught in your next year of training. Now, in the second, third and fourth years, these exact same things were taught to you, and if you are here another ten years, and have the opportunity to work out in a seminar with Otsuka Ni Dai, he will at that time, teach you the same things again. You can't practice junzuki and the basics too much.

One great way to supplement your training is by teaching. Teaching gives those that know less than you, the benefit of your experience and understanding. I have written fairly extensively on the gains to be gotten by teaching, and I don't intend to do that in this writing, but don't miss out on an important part of your learning. What I do want to write about here is recognizing your role, your position, and your importance in the continuance of information flow.

Recent observations give me the impression that some of you feel inadequate to the task. You probably don't think you know enough, you can't answer all of the questions that might be asked, or that your technique is not enough better for you to comment on theirs. The important thing is that you have something to offer them, and if they challenge you with an unknown, you have been given a chance to learn something new. On the front side, think about what you are doing; ask questions, if you don't develop a thirst for knowledge, you are far less likely to develop the knowledge. The "downside" is that once you know the correct, it is hard to ignore it and accept the incorrect. Will you make mistakes, miss-speak, get confused, and find out that you don't know, what you thought you did know? Why sure, but unfortunately that is all a part of the learning process, and there doesn't seem to be any short cuts. Who hasn't been told contradictory things by different seniors? We all have and that doesn't make it wrong. Wado is flexible, adaptable, and changing, though the core principles are solid and ever-present. As for the part that does change, these changes are of minor significance, such as minor application changes, which may change a stance, the angle of a block, or the level of a punch. It is important to do these things the correct way, and that is the way that your instructor wants it done. The instructors are students also; they are working for their instructors and teaching what their instructors are teaching. With time, this should bring about a unification of "proper kata". This is important for the uniformity of the class and the school, after all we are all students of the same instructor, whether it is direct instruction or through others. When you are helping a junior, correct the fundamentals of their technique. When you successfully correct a fundamental idea, you strengthen those building blocks, and you strengthen and stabilize the "more advanced" techniques, and the kata that is comprised of those basics.

So work hard yourself, observe your juniors and help them when you can, whether it is proper attiring, or technique correction. Approach the floor with confidence, not fear and avoidance. I have written this to the Yudansha of the school, however, if you are not yet a Yudansha, you soon will be, practice and work now as if you are. It is never too early to start thinking like a Yudansha. The proper mind-set will give your body something to work with and develop around.

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