

Necessity or Accessory?

Much of what goes on in a dojo functions as an accessory to its main intent. Whether the dojo exists to coach students in a martial sport, help people enjoy a physical workout, or teach aspects of self-defense, many of its trappings are unnecessary for the dojo's stated purpose. Among these trappings are the uniform, the formalities, the oft-repeated basics, seniors helping juniors, dojo cleaning, and even the camaraderie in the dojo lounge. If we eliminated each of these items or substituted for each of them, we could still fulfill the dojo's purpose.

It is surprisingly easy to determine what we might change or do without, i.e. what the **accessories** are; but, what would we consider the **necessities**, the elements we could *not* do without?

I suspect that on everyone's list of necessities would be the techniques that are to be performed. Implicit in the idea of teaching techniques, however, is a teaching method. Should the teacher demonstrate and have you emulate? Should you do so solo or with a partner? Should the teacher illustrate the technique the same way every time (the ideal form), or should he let his partner's weight and height determine how he varies the technique? Which one of these methods should serve as the default method (a necessity) and which as the variations (the accessories)? Or are variations just as much necessities as are the *seitei kata* (established form)?

What if the techniques require grabbing the clothes? It would be unfair if one person wore a sweatshirt, another a flannel shirt, and another a cotton T-shirt. Perhaps some sort of uniform is a good idea.

We may also want to require certain safety measures. After all, a well-executed but poorly controlled technique might end your partner's practice at least for the night if not for a longer period of time. We should entertain the idea of requiring some ritual so that students know whose turn it is to attack, whose it is to defend, and exactly when we are taking a break from engaging in martial practices altogether. I know, we should develop some sort of customs that signal readiness or relaxation.

In practicing techniques, what if one partner is uncoordinated enough that, despite the formal safety precautions, he executes his movements in a manner that either endangers himself or you? He should probably go through a program of skill and coordination building, repeated on a regular basis, so that we can depend on him to know at least the fundamentals upon which the techniques are built. But if the instructor is teaching us, who will teach beginners the fundamentals? I know, the most experienced students not only know best how to perform rudimentary techniques, but also are probably familiar with the intermediate techniques that the

instructor is teaching. He could probably spare those experienced students once in while to take the new guys aside and help them prepare for the main class.

While they are earning their way into the main class, it might be smart to have them contribute to keeping the dojo clean. No one, senior or junior, wants to inhale dust or find themselves with grit from the world outside on their sweaty bodies. In fact, if we all chipped in a little every night, not only would we keep the place clean, we would also create a feeling of working toward a common goal. It is a lot more comfortable to train with people with whom you have a common purpose.

Okay so some accessories might turn out to be more necessary than we realized. But the dojo lounge. That can go, can't it?