

A Separate Reality

Let's assume, for a moment, that there is a separate reality, a sort of parallel dimension, to which we have access. (Insert theme from *The Twilight Zone* here.) It is a dimension not only of sight and of sound, but of martial mind. Let's assume we can just observe this separate reality but cannot act within it. It is a reality in which traditional Asian martial arts are fully respected, honored, and lauded for the values they bring to society. What would those values be, and how would martial artists behave in that reality?

You may think that with over fifty years of martial arts experience and ranks in several traditional arts, I have the answers and am going to posit a few. Actually, I am going to guess at what your answer would be and then ask some challenging questions.

Think seriously for a moment, without reading ahead: In a separate reality in which traditional martial arts are culturally lauded, for what values would those arts be praised, and how would martial artists behave such that they would earn that praise?

Would martial artists be respected for their offering excellent overall fitness in a manner that is mentally interesting as well as physically effective? Maybe. If so, wouldn't senior instructors have to be in excellent shape for their age to garner that respect?

Would the martial arts be looked upon as methods by which students can personally challenge themselves to be better people, physically, mentally, and spiritually? Certainly that would mean that those students would not only be in good shape, but would be bright, rational, and intuitive people, wouldn't it? And that would imply that they would not show the normal human characteristics of bad temper, over-sensitivity, jealousy, petulance, etc., right?

Would martial artists be respected for training themselves to be redoubtable opponents if they should need to defend themselves or what is dear to them? I think so. That would suggest that they have tested their skills in some way that makes them confident that they would be successful in a physical confrontation. Those certainly would not be prearranged drills with cooperative partners or solo exercises, at least not as the only way they can test their skills, would they?

Would they stand out in a supermarket as a little more self-assured than others around them, or would they blend in such that people could not tell the eighth *dan* from the assistant store manager? If we would expect them to stand out, how would we recognize them? If we expected them to blend in, why would we expect this would be what they would want?

There are probably several more characteristics of laudable, respected martial arts and martial artists I could inquire about, but I am sure you are getting the intent of this little essay.

Over 50 years ago, Earl Nightingale shared *The Strangest Secret*: you become what you think about every day. Consider the state of the martial arts and your specific state as a martial artist. What have you been

thinking about every day? If your thoughts are not rising above the reality of what we have now, there will never be a separate reality of praiseworthy martial artists and culturally respected martial arts to bring into a new now. We have contention, jealousy, out-of-shape martial artists, and ineffective methods because we don't think enough about having them in *this* reality.

Often you get neither what you pay for nor what you prayed for. You get what you think about sincerely and what you are willing to accept for yourself and those you teach or train with.