

Means and Ends 2

Loyalty to the means keeps you from applying the means to the ends.

Once we accomplish an appreciable level of success in the art or style that is our means toward our self-defense ends, we are confident of our competence *within the confines of that art or style*. If we were to visit another dojo, we would find ourselves not so very confident and a good deal less competent at their techniques and training methods. That, of course, is to be expected. We then remind ourselves (1) that either the other dojo's methods are not the best methods for self-defense, anyway, and/or (2) that even if they *were* as good, *our* dojo's methods will still function perfectly well for our personal protection.

Well, as it is my habit to say: maybe yes, maybe no.

In my dojo, I was drilling my students, all of them black belts, on slow motion, restricted one-step sparring. I placed restrictions on how the student could receive or retaliate to the attack in order to force the students to respond with different, rather than habitual, reactions. This would force them to handle a wider variety of situations than the standard line sparring would normally allow. To a person, they had difficulty using the restriction of shorter stances, no doubt since their training had been in moderate to long stances.

I then took the time to explain how to get power in blocks and strikes when delivered from shorter stances as well as how to move smoothly from long to short stances. I said that their basic training made them competent at self-defense when the attack was a lunging thrust, but less so when either the attack was shorter, or when they were in a confined space. I explained that it was for this reason that our upper black belt levels required them to learn kata from other systems—so that they would also have to learn how to apply movements from positions with which they were not familiar, and most importantly, in my opinion, they would have to learn the principles by which these unfamiliar techniques functioned.

What followed was a rather long comparison of similar movements done from long, medium, and short stances. I explained that they already could deliver powerful movements and did not necessarily have to prepare them with a long stance and a proper traditional posture. For example, if they wanted to punch an attacker from an awkward position, they did not need to stop, take a stance, and then launch the counter punch. They knew enough to punch from wherever they were: the beginning of the punch would not look like any style, but the end would indeed look like the punch in which they had trained. In other words, in the real world, formalities are forgotten and informality (read: chaos) often rules. These black belts knew enough to instinctively adjust what they had learned to fit many situations, but they had not learned so much that they could adjust to *every* situation.

Their beloved style and art had served them well, but it had also brought them to a point where they had to start investigating other styles and arts, not simply because knowing more is better, but because when we fall in love with the art that has made us successful to this point, only a *partial* understanding of how principles of body movement work is possible.

Mastery of body mechanics and functional principles, both of which are taught by specific styles, but neither of which is taught completely by a single style, is the ultimate means toward the end-goal of self-defense.

How a deep understanding of means allows us to reach our ends, next time.