

The Depth of Budo 1

I wrote in [*Why do You REALLY Like Your Art?*](#) that Depth was one of my key attractions for on-going study. Why is it that most martial studies have such depth? Is it the nature of all worthwhile studies or is it unique to traditional martial arts? Well, my answer is yes and yes.

Often students in high school and college do not understand why their learning is not more career-oriented. How many times did you use geometry last month? When did you really have to know the political positions of Confederacy and the Union in the American Civil War? Who really cares if you use a comma, semi-colon, or start a new sentence? Show me what I need to know to function well in my career! Show me construction. Show me public service. Show me marketing. Despite the fact that, while in school, no one, not even you, knew what career(s) you would work in, despite the fact that construction work sometimes requires geometry, public service sometimes requires history, and marketing sometimes requires proper grammar, students never seem to understand that breadth of learning is the very thing that makes depth of learning possible.

I have only a BA in English and American Literature, but luckily both my high school and college curriculum were broad based. In high school, we had a Great Books program that mixed literature, philosophy, and classroom presentation. In college, we had extensive general education requirements in math, social, social sciences, composition, language, and literature. I did not like some courses and loved others, but after a few decades away from formal academics, I appreciate the fact that I understand the basics of subjects in which other people are expert, and that I can make informed decisions without necessarily depending on the slants of those other “experts”.

My graduate courses were in linguistics and poetry writing. Obviously these are concentrations within the field of English, but the first is very organized and semi-scientific in its theory-and-proof construction while the second is open to using subtle and overt references that may come from any field at all. If I try to prove that it is more desirable to put the comma after an “and” than to consider it a substitute for “and”, it helps if I not only know grammar but can decipher two or three foreign languages, can arrange a sentence structure that is clear, and martial an argument that convinces logically. If I write a poem citing a quote from Mies Van der Rohe or a building by Le Corbusier, I have to know something about Bauhaus architecture and how to emotionally affect a line or two without making an extensive logical argument. In other words, the broader my knowledge, the more successful I can be in delving deeply into a subject.

I first understood the hidden locks and throws of karate kata because I had studied judo and ju-jitsu. I first understood the increasing subtlety of aiki-ju-jitsu movements by understanding how to make my karate blocks more efficient. I can more easily teach these things to students of other systems because I have made myself aware of what those systems practice. I can write about what I

teach and learn because I know, more or less, whether to put a comma or semi-colon, or simply start another sentence (even though people still argue about this). I can write an essay that you might want to read because I have learned that the human mind is attracted most to reading that is constructed rather than simply delivered extemporaneously.

Having established, I hope, that it is very difficult to understand a subject in depth if you do not have a breadth of subject to draw from, let us now address the lead questions: Why is it that most martial studies have such depth? Is it the nature of all worthwhile studies or is it unique to traditional martial arts?

Continued next time.