

Training vs. Studying & The Elevator Speech

Usually the word *keiko* is used when referring to martial arts training in the Japanese *budo*. Another word, *renshu*, is also used. *Renshu* is “practice, training, drilling”, but as I see it (and native Japanese speakers should feel free to enlighten me if I am incorrect in this assumption), *keiko* implies a somewhat deeper involvement. If my understanding of the written radicals are correct, the word means something like, “to deeply consider the teachings of ten generations”, in short, to cogitate upon the old. To simplify, *renshu* is training; *keiko* is studying.

I study, train in, and teach “traditional” martial arts, but I have had a hard time coming up with an “elevator speech” that can explain to non-martial artists what I do.

Do I teach self-defense? “Yes, but not in the way you picture it.”

Do I enter competition? “Maybe, but not usually.”

Am I engaged in a course of self-development? “Yes, but probably not in the way you think.”

Do I practice? “Yes.”

Do I learn new things? “Yes.”

Do I play at what I do? “Yes.”

Do I continue a tradition? “Yes.”

Do I contribute to that tradition? “I hope so.”

Will that contribution be a lasting one? “No one knows.”

In essence, I engage in both *keiko* and *renshu*, in both teaching and learning, in both maintaining and contributing to a tradition, in both self-development and self-discipline.

For now, this elevator speech will have to do: **“I study and teach traditional Asian martial arts, drawing personal values from the training of old Asian warriors and try to pass those values on to others.”** It’s still too long and confusing for most nonchalant inquiries that might happen inside or outside elevators, but let’s take it apart in hopes of clarifying our own, already educated, understanding of the *budo*.

Many people outside the martial arts would think that, if I both study *and* teach, I must be something like a graduate student. They forget that full professors still continue their studies, only not in class or under a “fuller” professor. How about “drawing personal values”? *Budoka* know that their reasons for study and the values that derive from that study may be different than that of their training partners, but to the non-martial artist, “personal values” sounds, at the very least, like we are practicing simply to bask in the joy of the experience. There are probably a few martial artists who look at training this way, but most of us have training goals that we value: physical skills (speed, power), mental skills (reaction time, danger recognition), and spiritual skills (remaining calmer), as examples.

And what is it about ancient Asian warriors that present us with such values? An un-indoctrinated elevator passenger might wonder, understandably, why we wouldn’t seek value in something newer, more

Western, and less war-like. They might also wonder whether we really *study* or simply *train* like soldiers at boot camp. That brings me back to the title and first lines of the essay. We study and train in order to deeply understand the teachings of past generations — that’s the “traditional” part of traditional martial arts. And that’s the part to which most people can’t relate.

Why would you study and train in an item for the purpose of passing it on to the eleventeenth generation? Because, by then, one of us will have developed an elevator speech that really conveys what we do...and why.