

## Why do You REALLY Like Your Art?

I have written several articles touching upon the major reasons why a person may be attracted to a martial art. Generally, they are these: self-defense, exercise/sport, aesthetics, and self-development. These are detailed in my book *The Road to Mastery: The Benefits of Budo for Leadership, Self-development, & Martial Arts Mastery*. In the same book and in other articles, I have discussed many unexpected benefits of budo such as awareness, analytical ability, organizational skills, and teaching skills. But, sometimes the initial reason we begin a practice is not the ongoing reason. Further, sometimes the overt reasons are not the deeper, unspoken reasons.

Without getting too deep into self-analysis (despite that aforementioned growing awareness and analytical ability), I started reviewing my own reasons for continuing to train. I certainly want to feel in-shape and retain a high-level of self-defense ability, at least for my age group, but those reasons have become, if not lower on the scale, then at least more taken for granted. What makes me come out of a class feeling good about myself or “on the right path”? It’s not being able to dump a much younger student to the mat, or knowing more kata than a visiting *godan* instructor. It’s not having people show respect for my decades of training, my knowledge, or even my skills. Sure, I would feel out of sorts if any of these things were missing, but they are not the items that make me feel all is well in my martial world.

For me, there are just a few general items that qualify as ongoing attractions. The first is **Depth**. Although I have been studying since 1964 and teaching almost as long, I still find new levels of learning in both my aiki and my karate studies. When I correct a student on his most basic techniques, sometimes I explain how variations of those techniques can contribute to higher-level techniques and ease of execution. In doing so, I might articulate some principle or detail of which I had not been consciously aware before. In performing a kata for the 3000<sup>th</sup> time, I am shocked that a movement can be applied in a manner I had not previously seen, or that it is simply a variation of another movement in another kata I have done 5000 times.

Depth leads me to a second attraction: **Solving Mysteries**. Martial arts were originally taught with the Asian emphasis on experiencing viscerally (rather than understanding rationally), but because, as a Westerner, I learn with an emphasis on rationality, I challenge myself to explain, first to myself and then to others, how budo techniques work. Numerous times students at seminars have told me that their Asian instructors perform terrifically, but have difficulty explaining how one should duplicate their skills. Of course, some of this has to do with language ability; other times, it has to do with the absolute need to feel the techniques; but, much of it has to do with the Eastern preference for swimming rather than the Western preference for learning

the principles of swimming before getting wet. I have always preferred to learn the principles albeit while in the pool.

**Ease of Movement** is my third attraction. As I improve my skills, but find my athleticism challenged by age and old injuries, I also find that a relaxed, subtle application of skills comes almost automatically and is just as effective, if not more effective, than my former fast-and-hard responses. Understanding how I do what I do automatically and being able to pass that on to others both fascinates and satisfies me.

You probably have different reasons why you really, really, really like your art. Try to go past the surface attractions and begin to understand your own motivations. You will appreciate your budo even more!