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## Tracking the “Way “in Budo and Combat Martial Arts

**Finding the Right Teacher: “Without the right teacher, it cannot be called learning “**



*By Avi Nardia and Albert Timen*

It is said in Budo that it is better to spend 15 years looking for a good teacher than not to do so and to start 15 years too soon.

*Dogen*, a Japanese Zen Buddhist teacher and founder of the Soto school of Zen in Japan, said, “Without the right teacher, it cannot be called learning “.

The departure point for Budo begins with finding a good teacher, for if not, the exponent is likely to fall into the trap of doing Budo the wrong way.

A good teacher will impart the principles (called in Japanese - RI) of Budo to the student, and they will then be able to learn Budo the way it is meant to be. In other words, Budo becomes the instructor.

The instructor teaches the student how to learn the techniques. Even if the way this is presented is easy to follow, it is based on a series of profound principles. It must be remembered, however, that although the techniques used by the instructor are based on “**Ri**”, they will be imbued with that individual’s personality, like adding flesh to a skeleton.

The famous Buddhist priest Kobo Daishi (774-835) said “Don’t look at what your predecessors left behind, look for what they were looking for”. **The student or disciple must avoid duplicating their teacher.** On the contrary, the student must look at the “way” their teacher is looking at, and how they have traveled that way so far. The techniques that the teacher has are his or her own answers to the question faced along the “way “. They have been developed through the teacher’s personal experiences, trials, and tribulations. The student must look to the teacher for clues on how to proceed. This is what walking the same “way” means, not simply replicating the teacher.

The teacher instructs the student on how to master the techniques. The student uses this to find his or her own answers. I heard old Escrima (Philippine Martial art) teacher named Ramiro Estalilla saying something similar “I direct my students to find the techniques by teaching principals and body moving and sensitivity that give clues and directions to find the answers”

## The Right Attitude

Budo cannot be learned for you. You have to make great efforts and learn it for yourself. In order to do this the right attitude is required. This entails your instructor providing you with problems to work on. The student must listen well and take his or her Ego out!

The traditional and modern martial arts and combat systems are the same, we have only changed the tools used in the battlefield, but at all times, we preserve the principle of “Any weapon, one mind”.

In the past, many “teachers” tried to market themselves by posing with Japanese swords, but any sword man could look at the photograph and immediately discern that they possessed no knowledge. In today’s reality-based new styles, we see many instructors dressing up in combat uniforms and gripping guns, but it’s the same wrong attitude.

There is a saying there is no bad student only a bad teacher, but it doesn’t go far enough. There are many bad students that later on become the wrong teachers.

A true teacher is always a student and his attitude must be “always a student, sometimes a teacher “, and it needs to remain so. As you pick your teacher, avoid anyone who represents himself as a grand master, for in combat, no one is a grand master.

If a teacher prints on his DVD cover something to the effect of “Not a traditional martial art - this is no-nonsense martial arts “keep as far away as possible. Why? ...All Modern martial arts are based on traditional martial arts and no one can change that.

And finally, remember that your ego can kill you much like the principle that even a dead man can still kill you.

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