

Budo and the Art of Being

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MO: What is the connection in your mind between Budo and the art of Being?

JTS: In the 70's there was a documentary made that was titled 'Budo — the art of killing'. It was a really good documentary done on Japanese martial arts. It featured amongst other people, Shioda Gozo Kancho and the Yoshinkan, and for me, it's a play on that. Martial arts for me is a 'way' of Being. It's a way of conducting yourself, a way of living. I'm lucky enough to have been able to do Aikido for over 50 years since I first put on a dogi, and it's been an honour. Some people say I'm lucky, and yes, I'm lucky but not because I fell into it, but lucky because I had good teachers, and because I've got good students who've helped me live the dream.

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Dojo function after visit to Kashima Jingu, April 1983, with (l-r) dojo manager, Ando Sensei, Nakano Sensei, Shioda Kancho and author

The art of Being, for me, and this is my own personal interpretation as I've never heard this from anyone else, but I think if you're an artist, then you learn your trade, you learn your art form, and then you get to a point where you can *explain yourself in terms of the art form*. You can paint your ideas with your art form. I heard Billy Joel give a lecture to some music students and everything he talked about in his music — from when he started to where he was 20 years ago, to where he is now — he *played it in music*. He explained himself and he expressed himself through his art form. I've seen Shioda Gozo Kancho do it, I've seen Inoue Sensei do it, and for me, that is 'Being', you can explain yourself through your medium.

That's the 'Being' of someone who is high up in their art form. A lot of people aren't and therefore can't do that. They would talk about something and then when they did their Aikido it would be something else. So, while they may be stepping in that direction, I think the epitome is someone who has learned their art and then can express their thoughts *through* the art. That's the epitome for me.

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But there’s so many stages in there along the way. Inoue Sensei said that if you take an elevator up a mountain shaft to the top, you get to the top and you get one view. But if you walk, then at every step there’s a different view. So, enjoy the view at every step. This is, for me, ‘Being’. Sometimes we’re in a hurry – I was always been in a hurry when I was younger and sometimes I didn’t get to appreciate the steps, but I think that’s part of being young – and so it’s really important to not just learn the steps but to enjoy the view at each step.

BUDO AND RESPONDING TO LIFE’S CHALLENGES

In martial arts, if you’re running a dojo it’s like you’re upper level management. Your job is to make sure you have contracts for tomorrow and you have everything in place. At middle level management, you make sure that there’s staff, there’s raw materials to finish the product, etc, etc. At lower level management, you concentrate on the production, the day to day shift in the production. So, upper level management shouldn’t get involved in lower level management, and vice versa. Everyone’s got their jobs, everyone’s got their roles, so try and enjoy the role you have. It’s not always possible, but if you can enjoy it, or at least not hate it, then you’re ‘Being’. Otherwise, you’re just performing an exercise for monetary value, or worse still, performing an exercise for no reason. If you’re enjoying it, enjoying the thrust and parry of everyday life, if you’re enjoying the challenges that life throws at you, then you’re ‘Being’. And in Budo, there’s lots of challenges.

As a martial arts teacher, there are lots of challenges — how you deal with your students, how you deal with *different* students, how you deal with parents, how you deal with the outside world, where you take your students, and where you

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take yourself. You want to improve yourself as well as your students, and you want to improve the dojo. It's the same with any product. Anyone who's good is always trying to improve on their product, and sometimes it doesn't equate immediately to money. That's the hard part in this world of commercialism, we always look for monetary value or gain. But in martial arts, it doesn't always happen.

That's why in Japan it's so good because you've got sponsors. Various artists of old had sponsors, too, so that they never had to worry about feeding themselves. Of course, there were also artists who didn't have sponsors and there are many stories told about artists who sold their paintings for next to nothing or were burning them for warmth, paintings that are or would be worth millions now. In Japan, they had to do that, too, after the war. In different ways, we do that now, here, because we don't have that sponsorship. I don't run a *commercial* dojo, but I still have to survive and I make no bones about it. I have to do what I have to do to keep the dojo alive, and to keep the art form alive. Some people say that I'm selling out and they're welcome to that opinion. I know what I have to do.

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