

The Road Less Taken

By Joey Cadena, 4th dan IKCA Kenpo



There are three elements that must be developed in order to become a “total” martial artist. These elements are mind, body, and spirit. In class, the obvious focus is the element of body. When the sweat is flowing and the muscles are aching, the body is developing. As you train to internalize the new movements of a technique, struggle to remember a new section of the Masterform, or practice reciting the Creed, you are developing the mind. However, I feel that the

third element— spirit, is overlooked and underdeveloped. These days there are few martial artists who stand out in my mind that exemplify the development of this third element.

I have had the great fortune to learn from masters that have such a well developed spirit that you can sense the “force” that these individuals have without them moving once. This “force” is not something mystical like in Star Wars, it is the inner confidence and powerful will that a person develops when they have worked through so many hours of training and focused learning that you can just see their “spirit.” There is a tremendous difference between spirit and arrogance. As one begins to become proficient in the martial arts, developing the proper spirit is of great importance. With the attainment of physical skills, the chance of getting swept up with the new-found ability can lead to the development of an overgrown ego—a sickness that infects many talented martial artists. This false sense of invincibility can lead to problems and actually inhibits the growth of spirit in a practitioner. Ultimately, if left unaddressed, ego and poor spirit will lead to failure in the completion of training. The “shine” of physical skills eventually loses its luster and the training becomes boring. However, when a martial artist seeks to develop ALL three elements, there is a much deeper meaning to training and therefore becomes infinitely more rewarding. The constant challenge of reaching a goal and then being humbled by another challenge set before you is what develops a humble attitude which is the MOST IMPORTANT trait of a true martial artist. Mr. Parker once wrote: “A true measure of humility is when you remain what you are regardless of the success that you’ve become.” I truly feel that Mr. Parker’s words should be taken to heart and are the key to developing the true spirit of the martial arts master. A master, in my opinion, is one who develops obvious strength, pride, and confidence—yet is tempered by HUMILITY.

In order to be humble there must be the absence of EGO—these traits cannot exist together. If a practitioner is unwilling to “empty their cup” how can it be filled with the knowledge that the instructor has to offer? You must be willing to forget previous training or preconceived notions in order to see clearly what is being presented. You must be willing to open your mind, your ears, and close your mouth, for how can you listen to what is being taught over the sound of your own voice? The only way to arrive at any realizations is through future analysis and assimilation of skills from intense practice, experience in the art, and meditation on the new information that a practitioner can truly evaluate what they have learned. Mr. Parker said it best, “One becomes great when he comes to the realization that what he knows is very little.”

