

Sword and Spirit

The eJournal of Itten Dojo

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— Why Budo? —

Regardless of the times in which you live, or the circumstances of your life, success largely depends on things you can control:

- **Building a foundation of strong relationships in a community of mutual support and achievement.**
- **Forging a disciplined and positive mindset.**
- **Enhancing your physical health and capabilities.**

These are exactly the benefits membership in a dojo provides.

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The Dojo Compared to an Embassy

This conversation is best suited to those that follow a logical and analytical approach to things. This is not meant to insult or degrade anyone, but rather to enlighten you to the severity of joining a Dojo, as opposed to a well-intentioned and talented, commercial School. A dojo is literally a cultural representative on foreign soil.

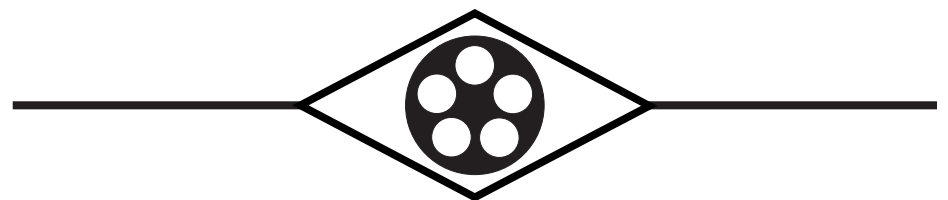
If you say that you have abandoned all of the Japanese influences and cultural attachments, then you may have a physically talented group of people training in a school, but that no longer qualifies as a dojo. This is not being snobbish, but is rather just a point of fact. I have looked at other viewpoints on this and frankly...

“You have been weighed, you have been measured, and you have been found wanting.”

I say this with all due respect because you may be physically talented in martial arts, you may have 122 World Championships and, oh, you may have an HBO deal for the next upcoming Samurai special, but if you have abandoned the traditional principles and valuable teaching tools and cultural opportunities, then you are a talented martial artist but not what I am discussing. (See, there's room and respect for everyone.)

As a potential student of budo, no matter how well-intentioned or even physically gifted that you may be, realize that you are not just walking into a space where people train in a physical art. You are in fact visiting a different culture, steeped in lifestyle principles, and yes, even a different set of ethics. Please refrain from walking through the door in a self-entitled manner, expecting everything to bend to your will, expectations, and weaknesses. We all have weaknesses, but try not to run through the door wearing them on your sleeve.

I am hoping that you have arrived at the door knowing why you're there. I'm also hoping that you've done some preparatory work and have not thrown caution to the wind like you have in other areas of your life. Have you



researched the dojo that you are visiting? Have you done any research on Japanese culture at all? Have you looked at your yourself today and done a comparative analysis with regard to what was working yesterday and what was also needing to be fixed?

Have you prepared your body for the type of conditioned but fluid response—not only physically but emotionally and intellectually—that you will be required to maintain?

You see, the new student can be much like a new religious convert, with all of the same zeal, hopes, aspirations, and sometimes silliness. Come through that door to the dojo realizing that you are not, in fact, the most important person in the room. You are hoping to become part of a group. There are aspects to the set study that will require solo efforts and concentration, but make no doubt about it, the change—oh, the best change—is learning to work within such a structure.

You needn't be the most conditioned, talented, or even most mature person walking through the door, but you have to be willing to realize that you are the nail sticking up as you enter into this environment. Why is that? Is it for me to be mean or to fulfill some Age-old Sage fantasy?

No, not at all.

That's your initial reaction messing with you.



And about removing your shoes so as to not stain or dirty the joint—well, there are many ways for you to track your garbage and dirt into the dojo, even while having pristine, clean feet walking about. You may look great in your new uniform and with your shoes off, but if you drag in your insecurities and expect placation, oh, then you are really going to stink up the place.

Do what you see, as you see it done. This is not to bind you and limit your potential and growth; it is to forge something inside of you that obviously wasn't there already. You recognized it within yourself and here you are. Now, if you can settle down a bit and allow your mind and body to actually be challenged, the cracks will become apparent to you soon enough. Again, this is not to damage you but to actually place you upon the path. So many assume that they are on the path, and assumption can be a real mother.

Have no assumptions walking in the door. If you can do this, you won't constantly be putting your foot in your mouth. First impressions matter, but not as much as a sustained, level-up acceptance and recognition of why you are there. If you can understand what this journey is about, beyond the need to kick someone's ass, then you will be off on your journey in a positive, healthy way

Please refrain from the very boring (and seemingly timeless) need to tell everyone in the room that you are going to be a lifelong member and just how productive you're going to be. You are already walking in the door with enough faults and inequities that there is no need to stack the deck against yourself. Be careful not to run your mouth. Someone might believe you and raise expectations so high that you will think that you are in a hot oven.

The dojo is no place to "fake it until you make it." If the dojo is operating properly, a light will be shined upon each and every student, individually and collectively. Do you notice I haven't mentioned one word about technique, training processes, or the day-to-day concerns of self-defense? That is because I've done that for decades and I've also worked in environments that made me come to these conclusions. Move beyond the dojo walls and you will find that you will need skill sets, personal flexibility, and those archaic strategies that you learned from your sensei in many more ways than you'd ever expected.



If you have read this far, I will end this with another caution. Do your homework: What I'm putting forth is only true if the leadership of the organization that you join is emotionally healthy, truly talented, and invested in more than their own, personal interests. So many people have been damaged by narcissists—if you only knew how easily available abuse is in a dojo environment, if one of these nut jobs gets their hands on a group of people that have not done their homework and prepared their mindset and research for their journey. Do not become a victim of a cult of personality—that is not what I am advocating—and that is not what any emotionally healthy sensei that I've ever met would do.

And now a final caution, to those that would be called "Sensei."

Note that you have lives, minds, and bodies in your hands, and do not do one single thing to sacrifice the principles, ethics, and healthy training processes that will keep your students safe, ever growing, and ever successful. If you are a stunted man-child or woman-child, get out of the Arts and get out of the business. Some of us have been around a while and we see you. Straighten up and fly right and help others, or admit that you have never studied real Budo in your life.

You may be a physically talented martial artist, but you are certainly not a budoka. 

Salahuddin Muhammad is dojocho of the Takeshin Dojo and director of the Nihonden Aikibujutsu Senyokai. An overseas director (Nihon jujutsu division) for the Japanese Budo Association under his teacher, Asano Yasuhito Sensei, Muhammad Sensei is the current head of Hontai Hakkei-ryu, and a student of Shinkage-ryu Hyoho (Asano-ha). He is retired from the fields of private client and executive protection, and has also worked in fugitive recovery.

