

# Sword and Spirit

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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 an authentic dojo provides.*

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## The Path of Becoming

*Editor's Note: Castillo Sensei provided the photo at left and asked specially that it be included in this issue, as the photo features the late Jon Dearborn. Mr. Dearborn passed away in October 2024 and this photo was taken during the last time Castillo Sensei and Mr. Dearborn trained together.*

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There are many valid reasons for studying the martial arts. There are many beneficial martial arts that will provide you physical self-defense and conditioning. Perhaps you just want a short self-defense course and that is the extent of it. Upon completion, you may even receive some type of certificate that announces that you have arrived. The type of journey that we would like to discuss, is the path of becoming. What does that mean and what does it entail? It sounds vaguely esoteric but I assure you that by the time we're finished here, we will make ourselves perfectly clear. Just as receiving the shodan recognition is only an initial step—something inspiring for the serious beginner—learning to defend yourself is an important step along your path. But it is certainly not the deeper consideration of BECOMING.

Your journey in the martial arts should offer signposts along the way, and these are vitally important to recognize and to follow if you are to truly understand BECOMING. If you're still confused, sit back, turn the page, and stay focused on not only the words in this piece but also the meaning between the words.

A proper dojo will want you to be focused on your objectives, goals, and what inspired you to approach the dojo in the first place. That is a wonderful start. I want you to understand that each step along the path is connected to the next step. No matter what you achieve, no matter what level of skill acquisition that you attain, and no matter what rank or prestigious position in the dojo that you achieve, you should still understand that you are BECOMING. The path of becoming is a daily set of prerogative, choices, and decisions, with which you learn to never be satisfied with where you are, all the while having a great appreciation and gratitude for the path that you are on. Each link within your chain, so to speak, must be connected within the



linkage of the chain and lineage of the dojo that you belong to. Becoming is a state of being and a spirit of *kaizen*—constant growth and transcendence into something greater than you were yesterday.

In your journey, you are “becoming” every day. You should be becoming more patient, cooperative, aware, resilient, and peaceful—but with the strength and fortitude to utilize your skill sets in the most productive manner.

As a neophyte in the dojo, you may be reminded that the dojo needs to be cleaned, of the dojo rules, and certainly the nuances of proper, basic technique. As time passes, these reminders will be much less necessary, as you are becoming a more productive *deshi*, training partner, and valued member of something bigger than yourself.

Each stage of *Shu*, *Ha*, and *Ri* will move you through phases and plateaus, thus leading you to becoming something very different than what you were before. A great man once said that if you are the same at 50 years of age as you were at 25 years of age, then you have wasted 25 years. The path of BECOMING is just that, the realization that change is the changeless state, which is always changing. You should always realize that BECOMING, is a never-ending series of growth periods. These growth periods are not however guaranteed. Stagnation and self-imposed limitations can set in, you can regress back to earlier weaknesses and personal imprisonment.

It is very important that you understand your journey and why you undertook it in the first place. Only you can define your reasoning. You are also the only one that can take yourself off of the path. Words like perseverance, transcendence, and change must become much more than catch words and phrases. You must remind yourself that this journey is about much more than the petty accumulation of recognition and rank within a structured



curriculum. If all that you can see are your accomplishments in the eyes of others, then you have certainly developed a framework for frustration and regret in your studies.

This is the first of several possible discussions that may lead you to some conclusions about how you view your path not only in the dojo but more importantly, in life. I would like to discuss this further and I hope that you will join me but I want you to realize that the only mystery in your studies, is the mystery of you. Join with others, partake in a beautiful walk along the path that can provide so much benefit, that you eventually realize the benefit is the journey itself. I would like to once again remind you that this is not meant to impress you with flowery words but rather to make you think. Perhaps you will pause, breathe, and reflect upon why you're doing the things that you do in life. Why are you in the occupation that you find yourself in? Why do you choose the social circles that you do? Are you overly agreeable or disagreeable? If so, why?

The physical aspects of Budo hold within their grasp, the opportunity and potential to learn so much more about yourself, your environment, and what your future may hold. Please join me on the path to BECOMING, for anything less is merely martial arts, and many people have undertaken that journey but never realized the path of BECOMING. 🌀

**Edward Castillo (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, Castillo 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.**

