

Martial Arts Learning by GM Angelo

Wow that is such a loaded heading. What does martial arts learning mean to me and what does it mean to anyone trying to understand their chosen art. In the beginning maybe we learn for self defence to protect ourselves, our family and loved ones or maybe we do martial arts classes to get away from our family and loved ones or just to give us a break from being a parent and the grind of everyday life. Is it a form of escapism in order to loose yourself for a couple of hours in something that takes you to another place in your mind?

Do you do martial arts or are you studying martial arts?

Doing is copying a style or system, a prearranged set of movements that require no thought process it could rely on aggression or an attacker to do something in a certain way that you have rehearsed that response to that attack. Yes we all know we have to repeat the movements over and over again to make them second nature but what if we learn the movements wrong just because we were shown that way. Would we say that this type of doing is studying the martial arts? Some people only do Pressure points thinking it is the holy grail of martial arts and it is not necessary to know anything else or to train in anything else, others may do karate at 70 years old in the same way as they did when they were a youthful 25 is this correct?

Do you follow martial art fashion?

It seems the world and its wife is now doing MMA and clubs are popping up everywhere, it used to be Kung Fu, Wing Chun when Bruce Lee made it fashionable in the 70's when clubs were appearing even at the local take away, then it was Thai Boxing, BBJ not BJ that is something different, Capoeira, KravMaga etc. and I am sure you can think of many more. I am not disrespecting any style I am just making an observation on our motivation for learning any art. Do you just want the coveted title of Black belt or Master which seems to be given out more easily these days than a toy with a MacDonald's happy meal. How can a child of 6 years old get a black belt what are you saying to him or her exactly that they can defend themselves? You leave them no where to go they already think that they know it all or is that the instructors fault? We do not mind kids playing and being the next Karate Kid but we can't all be Bruce Lee and to me receiving a black belt is just like getting your learners permit and now the real learning starts, it is a journey not a destination. Studying your chosen art should be an education, an education about yourself and life it is not just about copying shapes or forms, does your art contain principles which you can apply to every situation no matter what! If it is only system style driven or the classic "We always do it like this it was handed down by the masters this way." or another one "It's tradition."

Ask yourself are you studying or copying?

Studying is taking any technique and applying the principles to it so it works in any given situation. The techniques are only there to allow you to study the principles they are not the art or system. I repeat techniques are not the art or system they are a way of learning the principles. There are over 350 principles and still counting, some of them overlap and you may understand them in lots of different ways, just to give you a flavour I have listed some of them down this is not the whole list but you get the idea. Good Posture(maintain your posture as you take theirs), Footwork (there is no arm movement without a corresponding foot movement), Keep your elbows in then you have to use your footwork or you will be reaching which is weak and will take you off posture. These are the basic ones it would be difficult to list them all and to explain them in the way that justifies them and gives clarity of meaning. Here are a few more; continuity of motion, absorption, deflection,

projection, never go back on the same path, circles, spirals, dots, three wayaction, disrupt the base, centreline, creating voids, displacement theory, no two things can occupy the same space, an aeroplane landing when applying principles, using your core or body as a unit, diaphragmatic breathing, give the energy somewhere to go and the list goes on and on. Some people have asked me to list all the principles down, I said it would not help you as they are only words, they only take on meaning when you have learnt them with your own body feel and committed that feeling to your own subconscious mind.

So studying is a different thing all together

We all know we live in modern times where people want everything in a hurry, where six people of the same family in a room just text each and think they are communicating, we can no longer can make the student wait outside the temple to see if he or she is serious because he will just find an instructor who will take his money and give him that instant gratification of being somebody important. After watching You Tube everyone thinks they can do martial arts and the keyboard warriors are very quick to voice an opinion on where you are going wrong without even a basic understanding of the concepts. I will just share a quick mail that someone sent me which told me everything about the person and his Instructor all in eight words.

“My Instructor said we have the best style”

Reflections on teachings

Students come and go, pretend to be loyal but it's just for show,
How long before my black belt they cry, many years I will not lie,
In the days of just add water grades, there is no depth only strays,
Knowledge is shallow, egos large, sometimes you wonder who is in charge,
We paid a fiver we want to know, it's not that easy you need time to grow,
I'm still learning the same as you, stick with one thing don't jump the queue.

Poem by GM Angelo