

# Sword and Spirit

The eNewsletter of Itten Dojo

November 2017



## — Why Budo? —

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

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

*These are exactly the things membership in a dojo provides.*

Copyright 2017 Itten Dojo, Inc.  
701 W Simpson Street, Suite C  
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-3716  
[www.ittendojo.org](http://www.ittendojo.org)

## *Life Hacks from the Martial Arts...*

### **Why Train? The Martial Arts are Fun!**

I'm regularly asked why I study martial arts. Why do I spend hours at the dojo each week, hundreds of dollars a year on equipment and travel? Why learn the technical jargon of the art, the history of Japan, or any of the other things, big and small, that encompass the study of traditional martial arts?

I've tried answering these questions by talking about how what is learned in the dojo is applicable to real life. I talked about how it was a good workout, and the camaraderie of the dojo. But none of these explanations really answer the question of why, exactly, do I study that martial arts.

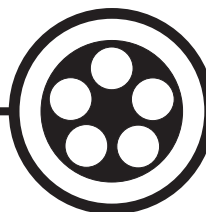
The answer that I wish I had given every time I was asked the question? The practice of martial arts is a whole lot of fun!

So, why not just say that, right up front?

For one, it is common to associate "fun" with "frivolous." There is a lot of disposable fun in our culture today, throw-away activities that serve primarily to eat up time and provide entertainment. Television, internet surfing, social media, video games, and innumerable other things are also "fun," but they aren't necessarily enriching. This sort of fun serves as the reset between important things, not as the centerpiece of life.

People join gyms and inter-office sports teams, take up weightlifting or cycling or swimming, grow a vegetable garden, pursue knitting or sewing, and any number of other pursuits that require time and money investments comparable to those of the martial arts, but when asked why, they can point to an end goal — lose weight, get healthier, make a scarf or a vase, or save on grocery bills. There is something in having that concrete goal in mind that seems to provide a built-in answer for the question of why someone would do those things, and makes the fact that those pursuits can also be fun a somewhat secondary consideration.

*Continued on next page*



On the surface, the study of martial arts doesn't have the same, obvious benefits. Unless you are a professional fighter, soldier, or law enforcement officer, you won't need to apply the physical, combative skills on a regular basis. Most people will never be involved in any sort of violent altercation. Given all of this, it can appear as if martial arts are a frivolous pursuit.

But just because something is fun doesn't make it frivolous, and the things that make the martial arts a serious endeavor are the same things that make it fun.

Learning new physical skills is immensely rewarding. While everyone has run, or lifted something heavy, very few people have any experience with developing the coordination and conditioning that comes with the patterns of movement and internal reordering intrinsic to martial arts. The early days are full of constant learning, as the student is taught the foundational skills. There is frustration, a common emotion when learning something new, balanced out by the success of remembering and using the newly learned movements and skills within class.

As students get more coordinated, stronger, and faster, they start to see that they can learn how to do things that they might not have thought they were capable of before. They gain confidence, and look forward to class because it gives them an opportunity to improve their existing skills. And as they learn new skills, the cycle continues. Each class becomes a challenge that the student can overcome, growing in both skill and confidence.

This is hardly unique to the martial arts. Learning any physical skill will involve the growth of one's physical vocabulary, physical conditioning, and general health. What's unique about the dojo is the bonds that grow between the students.

Martial arts are, at their heart, about defeating an opponent. In the dojo, you take turns throwing or striking

your partner, and then turn around and let them do the same to you, all for the benefit of mutual learning. This cycle creates bonds of fraternity that can't be easily explained to the outsider. While I was training for my black-belt exam, my training partners and I would spend three or four hours in hard, physically demanding practice, and then retire to the local wing joint, sweaty and sore, to laugh and chat over spicy wings and pitchers of good beer.

I spent nearly a year preparing one of my juniors for her black-belt test, and in the process forged a friendship that will last a lifetime. My teacher and my seniors are the men I aspire to be, and they are in the trenches with me every day helping me to achieve that goal. There is no other relationship like that formed within the dojo.

The practice of traditional martial arts is intrinsically connected to improving your life outside of the dojo. From life skills, to strategies that are as applicable in the boardroom as they are on the tatami, the martial arts will elevate your everyday life.

In the course of my studies, I've learned, among other things, how to tie a bow-tie, how to organize a major seminar, how to act at a black-tie event, the proper manners for a formal dinner, a half-dozen ways to wear a pocket square, how to iron, how to organize and prioritize my work-day, how to serve a meal, and many other things, small and large. I've met people from all walks of life, had the opportunity to travel and train internationally, and have comrades all over the United States.

The study of traditional martial arts is absolutely a serious endeavor, which demands a lot of time and effort from the practitioner. In return, you will forge bonds with your fellow students. You will gain physical prowess, get in shape, and become a more capable person in every aspect of your life.

But, above all, you will have one heck of a lot of fun. ☺

***John Butz holds the rank of sandan (third-degree black-belt) in Yamate-ryu aikijutsu, is a student of Itto Tenshin-ryu kenjutsu, and serves as an assistant instructor to the aikijutsukai at Itten Dojo. Many of his essays have been published on Curiata.com.***

