

Sword and Spirit

The Journal of Itten Dojo

April 2025



— 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.

Copyright 2025 Itten Dojo, Inc.
701 W Simpson Street, Suite C
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-3716
www.ittendojo.org

Pitfalls of Natural Talent

A traditional dojo is an interesting environment, filled with a diverse cast of characters with unique mindsets. After decades of studying martial arts, one will meet every type of personality and mindset that can be imagined. Some *deshi* (students) struggle with the physical aspects presented. Others may catch on quickly after enough repetition. One of the other categories is the naturally talented individual with tons of potential. For everyone, the journey undertaken at the dojo should present excitement, challenges, create questions, and sometimes truly frustrate those who enter therein.

Each personality type has a certain level of physical attributes and qualities. Instructors: Have you ever had a student that is just naturally talented and seems always to fire on all cylinders, naturally grasping the physicality of the techniques presented? They can be fun to watch and great to teach, but there are certain drawbacks.

Throughout time, some with great potential have come crashing down, experiencing feelings of loss and worthlessness and never achieving their goals. Why does this happen? Why do people with great potential burn out? I am presenting these questions to you because training within the environment of the dojo is also a study of the human condition. Give me the hard worker with less potential but true grit, over the naturally gifted individual, almost any day.

The dojo should provide a structure that weeds out personal weaknesses and helps students become focused and sharp. Oftentimes, the student with potential and natural talent is placed on a pedestal, being a focus of the dojo. The problem with this is that they often remain unchallenged in their studies. They are so used to being held up as the example, that they are often able to hide in the shine of the adulation. It is important that we recognize those with natural gifts, encourage them to develop further, but also to look for signposts showing areas of development that need to be addressed. Just as I stated in a previous piece, “do not place instructors on a pedestal,” it is also important to not place these types of students on a pedestal. They need to feel like they are part of the challenge, the struggle, and the journey.

As instructors, we have to realize that budo is the process of minimizing and crushing the ego. We do not want to put forth such adulation of the



student's talents that the attention feeds the egocentric self. We must recognize that with each development, we must also present the talented student with further challenges, and the frustrations that will temper them and their ego. Do not bend on expectations. Their natural ability should not put them above the other students and they should be held accountable for the same responsibilities and obligations as everyone else. Speak to the group as a unit and do not hold up the most talented students as more important than everyone else. We are all on some part of our journey. No matter how talented, no matter how focused, we all matter as a group.

Far be it for me to ignore the fact that there are more and less talented individuals in the world. These talented individuals can represent a dojo and make everyone proud. If the ego is tamed, this talented individual may prove to be a wonderful representative and a shining example of the technical curriculum that is taught at your dojo. We must avoid producing a talented egomaniac. It is an easy trap to fall into. It is easy to believe our own press.

Students: We must all remember the true, intrinsic value that the dojo can bring to our lives. Understand the

different types of students that are in the dojo. Learn a little bit about human nature and communication. Do not get overly invested in your physical gifts, because one day they will diminish. The most important part of your journey is the journey itself. Take your time when learning. Even if you have physical gifts, you may miss something if you rush through the process. Be patient, as the unification of skills and knowledge takes time to develop. Be kind. Be kind to the students that struggle or may have less talent than you do. Be the hero that the dojo is looking for but without being a jerk.

Parents: If you have a child that is physically gifted with great potential, learn to teach them emotional intelligence. This will preclude them becoming bullies. Develop an award system for their accomplishments but also teach them the value of competition in life. There are rules to this. The world needs talented children with physical gifts, emotional maturity, kindness, and empathy.

Everyone: Please ponder the questions that I presented in this essay.

Let's discuss it in the future.

Have a beautiful day, on purpose. 🌸

A Request from Castillo Sensei

My name is Edward Castillo. On October 20th, 2024, **I had a series of cardiac traumas, resulting in a hospitalization.** I am in need of assistance as I can't work at this time and things have taken a downturn financially. **I am seeking assistance while recovering from this life-changing situation.** I am a martial arts instructor and have a limited capacity for any physical activities. As you know, the monthly bills mount and it becomes difficult to focus on recovery, with the other worries involved. I am working on making a full recovery and my particular health insurance does not cover my cardiac therapy. Thank you and any assistance is appreciated. All the best to you and yours.



**Donate via
GoFundMe**

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.

