

Completeness - Perfection

There is a wonderful old Zen story: A master gives his disciple the order to sweep the paths in the park of the temple. The student takes his time and sweeps carefully - it is autumn time, all paths. Then he goes to the master and reports that he is finished.

The master looks at the work and says, "No, that's not well swept yet." So the disciple starts again and sweeps carefully where there's really nothing left to sweep, and goes back to the Master and says, "I'm done." The master looks at the work again, all the paths are swept flawlessly, there's not a leaf anywhere. And again he says, "No, that's not good yet." He walks a bit, comes to a fan maple and shakes it vigorously, the leaves fall on the freshly swept path and leave colourful spots. "Now it is well swept," says the master.

What does that mean for our work with the sword, the fist, while sitting?

It means that the state of perfection must be a living state. Unfortunately, the very one-sided focus on very narrowly defined forms shapes an attitude that rewards dependent imitation. The students in laido are trained to follow exactly what is given to them without criticism. This is very Japanese and also for us western people at the beginning of a training completely correct. When a student starts his training, he should not criticize and take himself too important, but he should copy exactly what the

master tells him to do. In this way, in the course of a few years he will perhaps be able to reach a level that corresponds to that of the Master. However, if the teaching and the mental attitude of teacher and student are limited to pretending and imitating only, then the martial art will not be an art, but only a sterile structure. Unfortunately, the tendency in swordplay is just that. In recent years it has become more and more accepted that training is based solely on examination results and belt gradings instead of a lively and inwardly creative training.

laido has developed more and more towards a sterility that favours a state of mind that one of my former teachers formulated as follows: "You must submit!" However, who submits himself to another, even if it is a great master, on the other hand also wants others to submit themselves to him. It's called a cyclist: to bow up and kick down. This is not the mental attitude of a warrior. A warrior is free from submission; he neither submits to another nor allows others to submit to him. So today laido is sometimes a place of unfreedom, envy, aggression and intolerance. It has become too narrow. Of course it developed itself first, but today it denies any further development.

In contrast to it Karate has degenerated into the other direction. If you look at many clubs and even international championships today, it is a kind of boxing match in which all the subtleties and skills of Karate are missing. If you

wear gloves, you can no longer do open hand techniques or use any of the many interesting and effective hand positions of Karate. He can also no longer use deadly energy to strike effective points and stop on the skin. Karate has adapted to modern boxing and has become largely irrelevant.

Even for Zen Buddhism, the question of perfection is a real question. Because sitting down and grinning stupidly into the landscape does not yet mean "sitting". It does not even mean that one "grins". It also requires a real understanding of what nothingness and form have to do with each other. For most people it is enough that they belong to a great esoteric group and are something special.

Perfection and perfection arise in the martial arts, in the sword, in the fist, and just as much in the silent sitting, i.e. the fight with oneself, through a very difficult relationship between tradition and holding on and developing and letting go. If we neglect the tradition and with it the respect of the old masters as well as the understanding of what has been worked out and handed down by them, then we sink into the primitive brawls of a modern boxing glove karate, which unfortunately has landed on a very low level not only in the actions but also in the persons of the masters. A karate master who cannot be taken seriously in his own statements because he does not stick to his own words is not a master, even if he can hit well. The other side of tradition, namely remaining

stuck in the given, leads to sterility, which also leads to decline. For not only in Buddhism, but in the entire history of the world, there is nothing that remains the same forever. Not even the Himalayas or the Alps remain constant. Then what is the idea that *laido* should always remain the same.

A really meaningful approach to the martial art can only mean respecting tradition and appreciating what has been learned and handed down, and at the same time developing these values further and putting them into contemporary forms, even into individual forms. Because since there are no two equal people, there is no point in pressing all people into exactly the same form and thinking that this would be the end point.

So let's get back to our story. The starting point was the idea of perfection, by following a precept completely: It must be swept and no disturbing leaf must be left behind. But that is only "the beginning".

After reaching this technical perfection, i.e. the achievement of a qualitatively high level, which corresponds to specifications given from outside, an individual and natural "disturbing" factor must take effect again.

The shaking of the leaves apparently restores the state before sweeping (in our case: learning). But this only seems so. In reality the process of sweeping, i.e. learning, lies in between.

So what is a perfect master? It is a person who

has realized that he is a student. He is on the same path as in the very beginning. Only now he has a lot of experience. What distinguishes him from the disciple of the beginning is that the leaves, that is, the "chaos of the natural," are no longer there by chance, but by choice. A master is a person who has recognized that perfection is expressed in imperfection or perfection in error.

There is a very exciting film called "Chocolate" in which the Japanese master shows a great fondness for things with a flaw as a child. As an adult he prefers people with a blemish. They are for him the expression of perfection. It is not different in martial arts than in everyday life: The more a person produces and considers himself important, the less there is to get from him. If you look at the enumeration of cups, victories and master titles of many "masters", it trickles down your back coldly. I was once the press officer of a karate master in Freiburg, Germany, who had the title "youngest grandmaster in the world". He was very afraid that someone in his club could actually learn what he had developed himself. That would have taken away his uniqueness and his importance for the world. At the same time he despised all students who were beginners. Unfortunately not an isolated case but rather the rule, masters and pathologies are often like horse and rider.

The English term for the martial art "Martial Art" describes everything that has to do with

fighting. The German language is more differentiated there. We have a difference between martial sports, which is based on successes, graduations, external results, and martial arts, which is based on the techniques of the sport and allows further steps, namely to bring body, soul and spirit to a unity, "Ki Ken Tai Ichi" is the Japanese term for it.

Once again back to our beautiful picture of an autumnal garden, freshly swept and with autumn leaves on the paths. Not only romantic, but actually an expression of perfection. So when we speak of perfection and perfection, we should not assume that the master is perfect, but the path lined with autumn leaves. The Japanese call it *Do*, the Chinese *Tao*, we have no term for it in Europe.

Nevertheless, all those who are seriously engaged in martial arts should know that it is not they who are important, but the path they follow. We human beings have only a short time in which to visit this world. The way of the sword, of fighting, of meditation has already lasted for thousands of years.

We are only those who pass it on like relay runners.

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