

The Black Belt Book of Life - Topic #32

We Compete to Test Our Skill, Not Expand Our Ego

In the game of sport,
of competition and friendly foe,
*We compete to test our skill,
not expand our ego.*

Ego is the biggest enemy of humans.

Rig-Veda

*The world is a house of collyrium [an abode of evil];
a veritable well of the poison of egotism.*

Guru Ravidas - 16th/17th Century Mystic

*Learning increases ego instead of diminishing it
and takes us further away from the Lord.*

Kabir - 16th/17th Century Mystic

*Avoid having your ego so close to your position that
when your position falls, your ego goes with it.*

Colin Powell - U. S. Army Four-Star General

Ego is a great deterrent to the spiritual development of man, especially martial artists who exist in an environment intrinsically bathed in concepts of power. Consumed with his little self and his own importance, man often runs the risk of losing sight of the greater reality of a higher power and the opportunity it affords for spiritual growth, thus giving rise to the Rig-Veda quote, *Ego is the biggest enemy of humans.*

In relation to competition, the enlightened goal is not to strengthen the enemy ego, i.e., our ego is the enemy; nor expand its house of collyrium or well of poison. If we seek competition only to expand our ego, we're doing ourselves more harm than good. The goal of competition is to test ourselves, our skill, our character, our personal development. This is why we say, *we compete to test our skill, not expand our ego.*

Martial arts is a proving ground for the soul. Through it we acquire power, but what kind of power do we acquire—*Power in the Flock* or *Power over Ourselves*?

Power in the Flock is a reference to external, social power, the power that manifests itself over others. Power in the Flock is false, ephemeral and illusory. By exercising and exhibiting such power we become deluded, misguided, a detriment not just to others but also to ourselves.

External power is false power.

Contrastingly, in having *Power over Ourselves* our concern is not in dominating others but in controlling our own mind, passions, ego and all the inner demons and dragons afflicting us from within. Inner power is true power.

Gautama the Buddha makes these relevant statements:

*It is better to conquer yourself than to win a thousand battles.
Then the victory is yours. It cannot be taken from you, not by
angels or by demons, heaven or hell.*

*Though one may conquer a thousand times a thousand men in battle,
yet he indeed is the noblest victor who conquers himself.*

The irony of power is that the external version, the "power in the flock" variety, is an outward manifestation of inner weakness. Such an over-compensation often fools many people. Yet, upon closer scrutiny, those people who are boisterous, loud, vulgar, pushy, arrogant, imperious and overtly demanding are not powerful at all, but quite weak. Their bravado is nothing more than an attempt to gain externally what they lack internally—an integrated sense of self.

Martial arts is the perfect venue for exposing external power, which is really weakness, and developing internal power and strength. When people are intrinsically strong, they have no need to laud themselves over others. Rather, their way is to empower others, not disempower them. This is why *humility is the highest form of strength; arrogance the highest form of weakness*. Do we perceive Buddha, Christ, Kabir, Guru Nanak and other highly evolved souls to be weak? Quite the contrary. These were powerful souls with nothing to prove and everything to share.

As martial arts practitioners, students, teachers and competitors, we would be well-served to understand this difference between external and internal power and the competitive environment which tests us in relation to how we use power. It is not uncommon for some martial artists to use their martial prowess to intimidate, control and abuse others. It is a great tragedy, certainly for their victims but more for themselves because their power was given to them as a test to assess their worthiness to receive greater truths and, hence, greater power. When the power is abused, not only is their progress halted, but the karmic load involving the misuse of power becomes a burden to them. Eventually, they will be abused and controlled to the extent they abused and controlled others, either in this lifetime or a future lifetime. What we sow, we reap. What we place onto the Circle of Life, circles back to encircle us. We can't out run our karmas. In reality, we become the recipients or victims of our own making. If we place goodness onto the Circle of Life, then goodness circles back to us. Likewise, if we place meanness and wickedness on the Great Circle, then it is meanness and wickedness that eventually envelope us. There is no avoiding this truth. Therefore, we must be ever vigilant in our use of power, remembering that *we compete to test our skill, not expand our ego*. It is the ego that is the enemy, not the other guy. Once we conquer our own ego, we are well on the way to achieving the higher purpose of martial arts training in battle – to integrate the body, mind and spirit.

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