



David M. Valadez
Senshin Center
Dojocho

Why Weapons **by David M. Valadez**

Deshi: Sensei, why do we practice weapons?

Sensei: What do you mean, do you not see the benefits of such training?

Deshi: Yes, I can see the benefits. However, is it not true that most kinds of training will show benefits, if done in the right kind of environment? I do not think that benefits alone merit reason when it comes to choosing one type of training over another.

Sensei: This is true.

Deshi: So I guess I am asking why weapons and not something else?

Sensei: Ah yes, this is a good question: "Why not something else?" In answering it, clearly we cannot say because the Founder trained in weapons - as there are many things the Founder did that we do not do - for good reason. After all, we are from our time and not his. His reasons, while justifiable for him, can justify nothing for us. In addition, we cannot say we do weapons because our body art lacks in some particular area - as this reason would have us refining our body art training and not adding some other type of training which itself may also prove to be lacking. Yours then is a question of "What is it that is gained in weapons training that cannot be gained from other types of training?"

Deshi: Yes, this is a better way of stating my question.

Sensei: We practice weapons to experience the tangible of the intangible that takes place in all tactical dominations. In weapons training, because the normal senses are in no position to dominate our perception of the particular engagement, because we are not touching skin to skin, because things are often moving faster than our eyes can perceive, because our opponent is too far away to smell or to taste, etc., we are forced to relate to a combative engagement by means of another type of perception (i.e. another way of relating to the world around us). Traditionally, this is known as experiencing the ki of the engagement. With weapons, if you wait until your everyday senses can come into play, should your adversary be skilled in experiencing and in determining the ki of an engagement, you will be too late in your response and you will be killed. While being able to experience and determine the ki of an engagement is vital to hand to hand combat as well, much can survive should such a skill be lacking. For example, if I lack the ability to experience the ki of an engagement and should you connect to my jaw with a strike, if I am strong enough, or even if I am fast enough in terms of muscle reaction time, I can either

absorb your blow or have it glance off just enough to survive the strike and to counter-attack. I may even be better off, in contrast to you not hitting me, since I will now fully know where your outstretched limb is located - on my head. If, on the other hand, your sword strikes my head in this manner - I will be dead (if not with that blow then certainly with the next). There are many other examples like this that suggest time and time again that the ability to experience and to determine the ki of an engagement is more vital in weapons play than in fisticuffs. In weapons work, we learn to win the duel first, then cut. We learn to experience and determine ki by dominating it, by feigning its absence, by smashing it, by extending it, etc. We learn this because outside of this all other victories are a matter of luck or of a mistake our opponent has made. Learning to gain victory before striking is what we try to bring from weapons work into all the other forms of our combat training. Note: The strike that is thrown from a state of victory is a strike that cannot be defeated. This is central to Budo training. Gaining victory after having struck is relative only to fighting - not Budo. This is why many folks who are very skilled at body art are only skilled at fighting and not at Budo. We seek to be skilled at Budo - this is why we do weapons work.