



DOJO

道場

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Introduction

Dojo is a term used in Japanese martial arts (e.g., aikido, judo, karate-do) that refers to a hall or space for immersive learning (Wikipedia, 2019). The kanji do (道) means “the way” and jo (場) means “a place”, which makes dojo “the place where one practices the way” (Kendo for Life, 2013). The word dojo has its origins in Buddhism (Wikipedia, 2019). Dojos were initially adjunct to temples and were a formal training place for Japanese arts. The meditation halls where Buddhists practiced zazen were sometimes referred to as dojo (Wikipedia, 2019). In Japan, any place for physical training can be called a dojo. The term dojo is increasingly used in other fields, such as software development and process improvement (Ballé, 2015).

Dojo Etiquette

The etiquette that is observed in a traditional karate dojo is similar to that of the etiquette observed in a Buddhist temple. In a Buddhist temple, it is considered respectful to stand up if you happen to be sitting in the worship area when a monk enters (Rodgers, 2019). The traditional greeting for a monk is to press your hands together in front of your body and bow slightly. In Asia, a bow means much more than a handshake in America (Gaudoin, 2006). Similarly, in a karate dojo, it is considered respectful to stand up and bow when a Sensei enters the deck. Members bow to each other, at the beginning and end of each class, and to Kyoshi, when entering and leaving the dojo (Gaudoin, 2006). Hats and shoes are to be removed and left off of the dojo floor or outside of the worship area in a temple. Shoulders and legs are to be covered (Rodgers, 2019). In a dojo, practitioners of karate wear a gi, or traditional white

uniform, which satisfies this requirement. Eating, drinking, and smoking are prohibited in both the dojo and temple.

A traditional dojo is considered sacred to karateka, just as temples are sacred to practitioners of Buddhism, and well cared for by its members. In Matsubayashi-Ryu, it is traditional to conduct ritual cleansing of the dojo weekly or whenever it is needed (Gaudoin, 2006). This includes sweeping, vacuuming, and mopping of the dojo floor, among other duties, and is traditionally performed by Kyu ranked students as a sign of respect to the dojo (Gaudoin, 2006). Ritual cleansing, or soji, reinforces the fact that the dojo is supposed to be supported by the students and Sempai, not the Senseis, and prevents the spread of infections (Wikipedia, 2019). If a Kyu ranked student sees a Sensei cleaning in the dojo, the proper etiquette is to volunteer to take over for the Sensei (Gaudoin, 2006). In Japan, ritual cleansing is the custom for guests attending a tea ceremony or Buddhist temple (Wikipedia, 2019). Guests crouch down and wash their hands in a washbasin provided at the entrance before entering the tearoom or temple.

Dojo Setup

Traditional karate dojos are set up in a specific, standard way. The front of the dojo is referred to as "Shomen" and may contain a photo of the Grandmaster, flags, and/or other artifacts that are significant to that style (Wikipedia, 2019). In reference to Shomen, students enter from the lower left corner of the dojo and Senseis in the upper right corner (Wikipedia, 2019). The back wall is reserved for Kobudo or weapons (e.g., sais, kamas, nunchakus, tufu) and other training gear (e.g., kicking targets, Makiwara).

Dojo Community

The dojo is not just a “place where one practices the way” (Kendo for Life, 2012), it is also a community of practitioners with a specific nature and purpose (Velarde, 2009). At a macro level, this global community includes around 100 million karate practitioners on five continents and 192 countries (Aina, 2017). Karate will make its debut on the world stage at the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. At a micro level, the community can include karate practitioners training at a dojo and friends and family who support them. Some of the key roles of the dojo include: to provide instruction in traditional karate; to develop the mind, body, and spirit as one; and to promote balance.

There are many misconceptions about karate: karate is about fighting, karate is violent, karate is about earning belts, one must be young and/or fit to train in karate, etc. One way to dispel these misconceptions is to provide instruction in traditional karate, including instruction on its history, with the goal of preserving its wisdom and knowledge as a way of life. “A dojo is where you practice and train the way of anything, as long as the way leads you to enlightenment (Kendo for Life 2012).” The dojo plays a role in nurturing, building up, or helping practitioners mature in their training just as the church plays a role in helping believers to mature in Christ (Velarde, 2009).

Traditional karate stresses the whole body concept. This concept recognizes that practitioners of karate have spiritual, emotional, and physical needs and that the mind, body, and spirit must be developed in harmony in the pursuit of perfection in the art (Gaudoin, 2006). Just as the church is truly about the people it serves (Montrose, 2012), the dojo is truly about the practitioners who train there and those who support them. The dojo strives to meet the

various needs of its practitioners both inside and outside of the dojo. This includes providing fellowship, celebrating important milestones, and offering home cooked meals for a practitioner in times of need.

Traditional karate also emphasizes balance in all things. According to Kyoshi Geoffrey Gaudoin, 7th Dan:

Physical fitness, awareness, self confidence, discipline and self defense are taught and are equal in importance. At no time should you place the self defense phase uppermost in your mind. To do so will inevitably bring chaos and unhappiness to your life. (2006).

If the dojo fails to fulfill any of these key roles – providing instruction in traditional karate; developing the mind, body and spirit as one; and promoting balance – then the dojo is not functioning as intended.

Conclusion

Dojo is a term used in Japanese martial arts and meditation, and increasingly, in software development and process improvement (Ballé, 2015). The dojo is both a “place where one practices the way” (Kendo for Life, 2013), as well as a community of karate practitioners and those who support them. Dojo etiquette is similar to that of the etiquette observed in a Buddhist temple. Traditional karate dojos are set up in a specific, standard way. The dojo plays a key role in its immediate community and within the context of the larger community of 100 million karate practitioners worldwide (Aina, 2017).

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