



Cambridge & Impington Tang Soo Do Clubs



The Overflowing Cup

The philosophy of Zen has a deep significance when applied to martial arts. A beginner or novice enters the place of training with a head full of opinions and thoughts, but part of the discipline is to empty the mind so as to become a vehicle for new learning. In essence to be truly open-minded.

There is a story about an old Japanese Zen master who was engaged in conversation with a prospective student. The student chatted on and on, full of his own opinions and ideas. He described to the master everything he knew about Zen, trying to impress the old man with his great knowledge. The master sat and listened patiently for a while, then suggested that they take some tea. The student held out his cup dutifully and the master began to pour. The tea came to the top of the cup, but still the master kept on pouring. The tea overflowed but still the master kept pouring. The student unable to contain himself, pointed out that no more tea would go into the cup. The master looked up and said: 'Like this cup you are full of your own desires and ambitions. How then can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup.'

Zen is, of course, a Buddhist concept and was strictly adhered to by samurai. The Chinese who follow a complementary religion to Buddhism, Taoism would have perhaps said to the same student: 'Man cannot discover new oceans until he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.'

Instructors' Comments

In our Martial art training we should take the opportunity at the start of a class when we "Muk Yum", to empty your mind (Moo shim) of the thoughts and problems of your day, ready to learn new teachings.

We should stop telling ourselves we can't do something without giving ourselves a chance to learn.

This excerpt has been taken from "Myths and Legends of the Martial Arts" by Peter Lewis



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