



# Cambridge & Impington Tang Soo Do Clubs



## That which is Useless is Everything

*Stupid, stupid, stupid, rang out the voice of the senior student across the kwoon (training hall). He was teaching a class and pulled the offending pupil out of line. 'You have been practicing these techniques for years' he said 'So why do you keep getting them wrong. You are just useless, no good to anyone, least of all yourself', shouted the senior student. Then the master came into the hall to see what all the commotion was about and witnessed his senior student scolding the pupil in front of the whole class. When the class was over and the pupils had gone home, the master walked over to his senior student and asked him what the problem had been. The student told him that no matter how many times the pupil was shown the technique of blocking and punching with one hand he couldn't get it right. 'He really is useless Sifu (teacher).'*

*'Nothing under heaven is useless', the master replied, 'Everything has its purpose and its place,' he went on to say. 'Could it be that you see the flaws in others rather than in yourself?'*

*'No Master', replied the student. 'But what can I do with such a useless pupil?'*

*The master sat down and directed his senior student to sit as well. I will tell you a story that may help you find an answer to your question. Many years ago a carpenter and his apprentice were traveling through the district finding work as they went along. One day they reached a village called Crooked Oak and there in the centre of this village stood a vast gnarled oak tree. It was so broad it could shelter three thousand oxen. It was at least a hundred spans of a man's hand in circumference and its lowest branches were fifty feet from the ground. The old carpenter didn't even as much as glance at the tree as he walked past. But the apprentice just stopped dead in his tracks and gaped open-mouthed at such a spectacular enormous tree.*

*Seconds later he ran to catch up with his master. He said 'Never in my life have I seen such a wondrous tree, surely it must be the biggest and most splendid tree in all China'. 'The tree is useless', replied the carpenter. 'Why is that!' exclaimed the apprentice. 'Its bark is so gnarled that you wouldn't be able to get a straight plank from it more than about five or six feet long. Its trunk is twisted so badly that nothing I can think of could be made from the wood that would be useful. No apprentice, that is a totally useless tree'. He went on to say 'When I was very young my father, who was also a carpenter, brought me through this same village and I too made the same comment as you. My father gave me the same answer that I have just given you. It is a tree that is good for nothing except to stand there and be useless'.*



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*And with that the carpenter strode off with his apprentice following behind. The master stood there for a moment, looking at his senior student. Then the student asked `What has the old gnarled tree go to do with the pupil I berated?`*

*The master replied, `The tree was wondrous to all who saw it, it grew great and mighty and could shelter ten herds of oxen because it was useless. It was no good for building with or for making anything. It had survived for nearly a thousand years simply because it was useless. Do you think it would have grown that impressive size and lasted so long if it had been of any use to anyone?`*

*The senior student understood that something may appear useless to one person but it may be of value to someone else. He made an oath that from then on he would take extra care when teaching the pupil he had earlier called useless.*

## Instructors Comments

*We should always remember that each one of us is different and that we all have different qualities and abilities. What one might find easy another will find hard. We are all of different stature those with short legs will not grow long ones because they wish to kick high, high to whose perspective the short or the tall person? What we study is an art form not an exact science and we should not try to fit people into the same mold.*

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