

## Weapons Training in Martial Arts - What's the Point???

Most of the empty hand systems of martial arts have always had a rich history of weapons training attached to them, even if many in the modern era do not continue to teach this aspect. Older systems such as many of the systems of Kung Fu, Okinawan Karate, Japanese Ju-Jitsu and many more are mainly known these days for their empty hand teachings and some people forget these systems were created for use either on the battlefields of ancient times, or to aid in survival during lawless periods. As such the study of weapons was a fundamental part of training in the various schools of these systems, this training included weapons such as;

- The Bo / Kon
- Tabak-Toyok / Nunchaku
- Sai
- Sheng Biao / Johyo
- Tonfa
- Kubotan
- Hanbo
- Kama
- Jo
- Yari
- Swords such as Katana, Jian or Dao

And many more...

These days there are only a handful of systems that still actively include weapons training as part of their empty hand syllabus, and even fewer that teach just the weapons-based aspects of these arts (Kobudo / Kobujutsu). The number of people looking to train in Traditional Martial arts rather than the combat sport versions is decreasing, this could be due to people not wanting to spend the time and put in the extra effort to master the older systems, maybe the more immediate health benefits of the sport-based versions are attractive to potential students – I am unable to answer that at this time. However, what I can say, based on personal experience, is that many people ask ‘why do you still train in weapons?’, ‘why have I got to study weapons if I train in your system?’, ‘what is the point of training with something I am not allowed to legally carry?’ and other such questions. Now I can’t say my answer to these questions when I have been asked them is correct or the only answer, but it is an answer based on my decades of study in the martial arts, many of which included (and still includes) training in various weapons.

My simple answer is this – It is massively beneficial to your empty-handed study, regardless of your system. A more complex answer can also be provided, which builds upon the simple answer, so let’s take a look:

(Disclaimer, this explanation is based upon my own experience that weapons training has given me and may not be the same way you view or have experience training with weapons in martial arts.)

So, a more in-depth explanation relies upon us examining the history of some of the ‘empty handed’ systems as well as looking at the basic movements of weapons study along with a small leap of logic based upon some of the history of martial arts. The founder of Aikido (Morihei Ueshiba Sensei – usually referred to as O’Sensei) stated that he utilised movements from Yari, Jo, Sword and other weapons training into his development of Aikido’s empty hand techniques. If you watch a master of Okinawan Karate and Okinawan Kobujutsu, you will likely notice several similarities in their stances and body movement. What I am trying to highlight is that most of the older martial arts systems were developed at a time when weapons were carried / part of daily life for most martial artists, usually in their role of soldier, instructor of soldiers, bodyguards, and mercenaries. So, the

empty hand side of the system was more of a back-up for if / when they lost, broke, or were otherwise unable to utilise their chosen weapon(s). As a result, it is logical to conclude that these systems would have one methodology of body positions / body movement that they would train in and adapt slightly for if you were empty handed or wielding a 6ft length of wood with a metal spike on the end, rather than having their practitioners memorise one set of body movements for when they were empty handed, another for when they were using a short sword, another for when they were using a flexible weapon, etc... (you can see where I am going 😊). Based on this logical conclusion it therefore stands to reason that if you study Karate, Judo, Ju-Jitsu, or any other primarily empty-handed system that does not include weapons training as part of its syllabus (some don't but more and more are beginning to understand the importance and benefits of weapons training to their main system!), then you should include it. Imagine if you study empty handed and are incredibly fast, balanced, and fluid, how much would you 'level up' if you practiced with a solid oak 6ft staff, performing the same movements as when empty handed and persevered until you became incredibly fast, balanced, and fluid with the staff! It is like a baseball hitter taking practice swings using a heavier bat than the one they will use for the game, if they can swing fast and accurately with the weighted bat, imagine how much faster they will be when they use the unweighted bat during the game!

As mentioned earlier, this essay is based upon my own opinion based on my own studies and thoughts. Over time my opinion may change as I continue to study, likewise your experiences, opinions and thoughts may have given you a (welcome) different viewpoint and opinion, however there are many paths up the mountain, just because mine is different does not make it wrong.

Yours in Budo,

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