

COFFEE BREAK

Please let me begin by making this disclaimer that these ideas below are simply my thoughts, interpretations and opinions solely. Yes, I have constructed them over decades of training and engagement with traditional Japanese dojos and significant teachers, yet they are mine.

THE DOJO – AN IMPORTANT ECOSYSTEM.

The dojo is an ecosystem, at times robust and at other times fragile.

The dojo is a robust place of physical dynamism and metaphysical insight and optimism. It demands much from our bodies and equally as much from our minds. I remember as a Brown Belt and Black Belt training at the Brisbane Dojo viewing every grading as an opportunity to be the best uke I could be... It didn't matter whether I was grading or not, I wanted to be thrown by the best in the dojo (perhaps even the world at that time), as hard as they could to sharpen my uke and find a sense of confident indestructibility as part of my journey in this wonderful martial art. Speaking of journey, we embark on a journey of weekly training over a long period of time to hone our bodies and minds through ancient wisdom and practices offered to us through the dojo with the intent to arrive at an undisclosed time in the future at an often-unreachable destination called 'there' or 'enlightenment'. Generations past have sweated, bled, and cried tears in their pursuit of 'there', so that we have this privilege today to journey also. But it's not given to us freely, we must work hard on this path to get it! If we tread easily, we will be offered a photocopy of a photocopy – a diminished version of what past generations had achieved. What version do you want? I believe this is *budo*, and the dojo is our vehicle and gives us so much along the way; actually, more than the destination promises. But ask yourself, are we simply taking from this relationship? Are we 'servicing the vehicle' that services us? Is our relationship with it a one-way street, a 'transaction' like much of what modern society has become? Or are we equally giving back to the ecosystem so that it maintains a sense of homeostasis and thrives into the future to support others symbiotically to achieve their 'enlightenment' goals?

The dojo is equally fragile. It is an ecosystem where each of us gather as *budoka* and take spiritual and physical nourishment. However, we need to stop and think about how much we take from it and how much we collectively put back into it so that it is sustainably supporting human development into the future – because unlike a gym, the *dojo* is not simply about a place where you learn to fight or get fit with showy muscles, it is an institution with a mandate to develop the person holistically; to provide society with something useful and beneficial: a disciplined, productive and compassionate human being.

Energy in all its forms is a finite resource unless carefully generated and sustainably used. As students we rightfully expect the teacher to give their all for us, and we rightfully expect our training partners to give their all for us, in fact, we expect our bodies to give their all in the service of our personal development and achievement of personal goals. But as much as we focus on the maintenance – strength, balance, skill, nutrition etc. – of our own bodies for sustained training and growth, we have an obligation to spend some energy in sustaining the environment in which we



personally develop too. Therefore, ask yourself these questions honestly... How often do I 'uke' in gradings even when I'm not grading myself? How much am I advocating for our dojo so that it grows sustainably? How much am I giving back to the art that has given us so much? How much am I promoting its benefits so that others may become better and share in these benefits too? How much energy am I putting aside so that the ecosystem survives into the future and services other generations in the way we personally have enjoyed? We each have a responsibility in this, I believe. This is why I first took on the task of running a dojo in the first place, and later the goals of promoting GRAJJ online, and even more recently hosting local and international events. I truly believe in our art and its philosophy to promote a harmonious (and less violent) society, and not a divided one. In essence, training at our *dojo* or any other *dojo* that shares the philosophy of our art benefits society and humanity on a whole. So, if you too honestly believe this to be true, then why wouldn't you want others to experience it? The idea of 'service before self' is something I feel very passionate about and I think our *dojo* embodies and reflects this well in many ways. But together, I think we still have much work to do.

In all things we can only be strong if the unit or environment that supports us is strong. Progressing in the martial arts is no different. It dependent on the ability to train against many different body types and personalities. So, for us to really be our best, we should be exposed to many different people with many different body types – as in life, we must be able to deal with all walks of life to truly feel capable and successful. Many of you would have experienced this during the seminar; even Mori Sensei mentioned this attribute in the interview I conducted with him. So, as we close 2024 and look to 2025, I place this call to action in front of you all... Let's work equally as hard in 2025 on building our *dojo* further to be a location for many to experience authentic *budo* training as much as we do on building our own personal martial capability. Afterall, the symbiosis will feed back to you personally anyway! WIN WIN!

Osu!

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