

“JKD – Why It’s Not For Everyone”

by Chris Kent

Sometimes it’s easier to tell people what they want to hear rather than what they need to know. While the overall concept or idea of Jeet Kune Do may be great, like any system of philosophical beliefs or practices it isn’t suited for everyone. “Wait a minute. What’s this all about?” -- I can already hear people yelling – “Are you saying Bruce Lee’s art and philosophy is only for certain individuals?”

Let’s start by defining “concept”. It means *“an idea or thought, especially a generalized idea of a thing or class of things; an abstract notion.”* Bruce Lee lived, breathed, and probably dreamed martial art. It was the love of his life; his passion. While the average person may work out anywhere from a few minutes to an hour or so everyday, Bruce immersed himself in martial arts totally, almost 24 hours a day. He was a martial, an athlete, and a scholar. As a martial artist he physically investigated numerous combative systems, methods and techniques, noting their strengths and weaknesses, finding counter-movements to be used against various defenses and attacks, testing things to see if and how well they worked, adapting, modifying, and rejecting. As an athlete he was a walking example of superb physical fitness, exhibiting strength, speed, power and flexibility. As a scholar, he spent hour upon hour reading and studying about the human body, all forms of combative arts, and all types of philosophy; ancient and modern, oriental and occidental. If Bruce’s understanding evolved from these countless hours of rigorous training and study, how can a person who works out two or three times per week for an hour or so each time, and then does nothing or very little the rest of the time, ever hope or expect to truly understand JKD? By understand, I don’t mean merely having an intellectual comprehension of it (theoretical knowledge), rather, I mean a functional working knowledge (understanding based on experience).

Jeet Kune Do is about total growth of a martial artist; physical, mental, and spiritual. Self-knowledge is its foundation. A JKD person needs to know themselves inside and out. But not everyone really wants to expend the time and energy necessary to truly know themselves. It’s a lot of work, and some of it is not comfortable. Coming face to face with ourselves, while it can be liberating, may not always be an enjoyable or happy experience. Some people think they know themselves but in reality only know their strong or good points, refusing to see their weak or bad points. Self-knowledge is a continual process, and goes hand in hand with self-help. One only has to look around today to see the proliferation of self-help materials available. These books, tapes, dvd’s, and seminars are filled with great concepts, ideas and philosophies on how people can liberate themselves to grow. Yet there are still many people out there who are not growing. Why? The answer is simple. Some people aren’t ready or willing to help themselves. They won’t even read or listen to any of this material at all.

Others will read or listen, but won't take any action. And still others will take action, but not enough to be of any real use.

In Jeet Kune Do, one is supposed to develop a "discerning mind." However, some people prefer a "dependent mind." It offers them a feeling of security. In martial arts, some people, for one reason or another, may need a formalized structure. They may need the belts and certificates they receive. A ten year-old just starting out in martial arts may not be ready for the total freedom that JKD offers, or the commitment it requires. As my teacher, Dan Inosanto, stated, "You've got to start some place. Even a child has to be taught something before he can express freedom."

There's an old saying that states, "If you give a man a fish you feed him for a day. But if you teach him to fish you feed him for life." The problem is that there are many people who don't want to learn to fish for themselves. They prefer to be given a fish everyday. Their attitude is, "I don't want to be told that I have to think for myself, look to myself for the answers and 'find the cause of my ignorance'." That's why I'm studying under you. That's what I'm paying you for."

Bruce Lee stated that one of the reasons he disbanded all of the organized schools of Jeet Kune Do was that he felt that it was too easy for people coming in to mistake the agenda as the truth, and the program as the way. I personally feel that part of the reason was that he realized just how difficult it was for someone to do what he himself was doing, and that many would find it easier simply to follow him, put their faith in him, and wait passively to be shown the way.

In order for a person to truly understand and get the most out of JKD, it's necessary for them to be a martial artist, an athlete, and a scholar. As a martial artist you should study the physical body and all kinds of combative motion. As an athlete you have the responsibility of maintaining a high level of physical fitness. In his personal notes Bruce wrote, "The preservation of health is a duty. Few seem conscious that there is such a thing as physical morality." As a scholar you should explore, research and investigate what has been said and done in the past. The sign of an educated mind is not that one has knowledge, but that one knows how and where to find the knowledge if and when one needs it. More than simply reading, however, you should try to apply what you learn in your daily life.

It's important too, that you know what your goals or objectives are in the martial arts. Bruce knew where he wanted to be physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. If you go into it with vague objectives, you have neither the opportunistic freedom of being able to change directions and follow a different avenue of exploration, nor the firm route-planning that will lead you to a specific destination.

Some people don't want to see the truth, be it in themselves or martial arts. Jeet Kune Do is a path that can lead to personal liberation. But it's not an easy path. It asks a lot from an individual. As a conceptual approach to martial arts, and as a philosophy, JKD's fullest usage can only be realized by someone willing to reach further and delve deeper. If that is you, then JKD may be the right path for you. If not, you may be better off finding another path.