

Learning, Loyalty and Laughter In the Martial Arts

Master Dan Holloway

About the Author

Master Holloway was born in Japan in 1952. His father was an American serviceman and his mother was a native of the country. He maintains his ethnic traditions and speaks conversational Japanese. He has trained continuously in Isshin-Ryu since 1968, with additional training in Aikido, and Judo. He holds the rank of Go-Dan in Tokushin Kobudo. He founded Holloway's Isshin-Ryu in 1981 and is active on the Dojo floor. Outside of Martial arts he teaches graduate school, enjoys flying airplanes, and serves as part of a search and rescue team for the Civil Air Patrol – Air Force Auxiliary – (Captain).

Dan began his martial arts training in 1968 at the age of 15 under Sensei Norbert Donnelly. He went on to receive the rank of 6th Dan under Sensei Allen Wheeler. In 1997 he was given the rank of 7th Dan (1996) by Sensei Sherman Harrill (7th Dan) and Sensei Harold Mitchum (10th Dan-Hanshi). He became a senior student of Sensei Mitchum and promoted to 8th Dan (4/2005), 9th Dan (7/2014) and Sensei Mitchum honored him as a Hanshi (2016) and 10th Dan upon his passing (2016).

I wanted to address a few things important to the Dojos. These things are lost in a narrative that includes folks who only want to learn for themselves, people hopping from one instructor to the next, those that think one must train without having fun. Learning, according to “Webster” is the act or experience of one who learns, knowledge or skill acquired by instruction or study, and modification of behavioral tendency by experience. I do not know of a single successful student of Karate that does not seek to learn. Whether a white belt or “high” Dan most seek knowledge. At a higher level we seek to improve, at a still higher level we seek self-improvement to help others in their journey.

"No matter how you may excel in the art of Karate, and in your scholastic endeavors, nothing is more important than your behavior and your humanity as observed in daily life." - Funakoshi

Loyalty is another subject that needs to be talked about. I know a self-proclaimed “Sensei” that in the span of about nine years had five different Sensei. The student did

not get their way, next promotion, or accolades and left. Loyalty is not something you buy, many try. Since my first karate lesson in 1968 I had three Sensei. The first retired and the last two passed away. I simply wanted to please them, train hard, and persevere, regardless of whether I understood everything, or agreed.

Those that bought loyalty got what they paid for: a washed-out version only good for the next “pat on the back”. One person I know gave “gifts” or did “special favors” to superiors for promotions. The special favors kept people in their place of servitude. If things went bad, they bailed out. True loyalty is not reciprocal and personal gain is not a part of the equation. You can be loyal to a person, place, or thing. I am loyal to my family, dojo, and style. I’ll do what it takes to protect and make sure they are viable. The definition of loyalty to the warrior is different. The Kanji explains it; the top component means “center”, not middle, in this case center of your soul. The bottom component represents the heart, the essence of your being. To what and why are you loyal?

The last thing to address is laughter, remember, it has its place, not necessarily all the time, but in good time. My second Sensei, Sensei Harrill told me that the best karate ka were those that smiled. He said, “They had the best speed, power, and focus. Why? They knew how to relax. He’d point out to people with a constant scowl on their face and say, “see no real power”. Sensei Mitchum, my last Sensei would say the same, “they’re not relaxed”. Let go and have a little fun. This does not mean you have to drink yourself into oblivion to have fun, it means its good to have a laugh, let go, and not take oneself too seriously.

I was raised by a Japanese Mom and didn’t show emotion for a long time. To improve, I had to learn to let go. I had to learn that sometimes it’s okay to show joy and laughter, and sometimes it’s not okay. God has a sense of humor, he had to have been laughing when he made me. In my Dojo and a few others, we laugh, make fun of one another (in a healthy way), and just let go. It does not mean we don’t train hard. The kids in my Dojo understand how to work hard and how to have fun with one another in class.

“It is necessary to pursue other fun human activities. The art (Karate) of someone who is too serious has no flavor.” – Choki Motobu (edited, DH).