

2023-24 Budō season's theme – Gi-Yō-Shin Dōjō

« Nothing extra »

by Jean-Claude Hamel



« Nothing extra » (*Médên agan*) was engraved on the frontispice of the Apollon temple in Delphi during the 4th century before our era, alongside another even more famous saying « Know yourself » ; two messages focused on the Ancients' wisdom.

In Ancient Greece, a human life had to be able to tune up with the world, live in harmony with the Natural order to be successful. Then, excess (*hybris*) symbolized one of the main traits to avoid for mankind.

More generally, excess can be present in two opposite tendencies : « what's extra » (the surplus) and « what's missing » (the lack, shortcomings, the insufficient).

Original work by Pascal Krieger Sensei. CHŪ (the center, the middle) for the big Kanji, SUKUNASHI (Not not much) to the right in smaller Kanji, SUGINASHI (not too much) to the left in smaller Kanji.

A path of the middle emerges between the not too much and not too little. From there stems the guiding principle to observe measure in all things, conceptions that we find under different forms in Western and Eastern cultures – moderation and sobriety required.

All excess is beyond the right measure.

This right measure is the search of the delicate balance obtained only by systematically and tirelessly shortening the gaps that appear on both sides of this middle line.

It's not about reaching an average in the middle, tepid or neutral, but to find a challenging personal path, aiming for an apex of excellency, a balance between two sides, the lack and the excess.¹

On this path, we meet the search of harmony, notion often used in Budō – Be in harmony with yourself, with the other, with your environment, with the world.

Practically, with this central theme for our Budō season, I simply propose to intersect this teaching from the antique western wisdom with the essentials of our eastern martial practices. It will shed a new light on our Budō traditional concepts and their practical applications.

Below a few topics that can be explored through the study and practice of « Nothing extra » and the search of the right measure.

. Go over each martial movement, remove the unnecessary, while keeping the essential. A long personal work of stripping down each gesture will allow us to get closer to a form of elegance, even of harmony (*Dô* aspect), and in parallel to approach a form of efficiency (*Jutsu* aspect).

. Optimize your energy expenditure (muscular and mental) facing the efficiency of a movement – *Sei Ryoku Zen Yô*.

The search of the right effort using a minimum of energy to accomplish a precise movement demands an optimal coordination. A body/spirit unification, and hours of training.

. To pass on a new Kata, for teachers – the Kata and nothing but the Kata, *Kata ni shitagau*. Try to pass on an « empty » form, without adding your own interpretations and desires. Also, avoid the shortcut of the « too little » to transmit the right form ; the essentials must be fully present.

. Enact correctly your role of *Shidachi* and/or of *Uchidachi*.

First, find your place. Learn to stay there for the time both needed and sufficient. Then, and by analogy with the work of an actor, know your text well, and for *Uchidachi* your partner's as well. Finally, play sincerely and fully the part you took on, without overflowing, neither in gestures nor emotions.

. Discover and feel the right distance with the other – *Ma-ai*.

As an example outside of the realm of Budô, a siberian tale recounts the dilemma of two hedgehogs exposed to the cold and the freezing wind. It highlights the necessity to find a right middle between being too close and being too far from the other.

. Cease the right moment to act facing an attack.

Choose the right time, this decisive, irreversible moment to move, the notorious *Kairos*. It's, here and now, the right measure applied to time, between the too early and too late.

. Take well-reasoned risks.

Life is risky, everyone can attest of this in his/her daily existence.

If we choose to practice a martial discipline like Jô, in which the two sides of *Dô* and *Jutsu* are intertwined, the notions of danger and risk are *de facto* omnipresent. So, for a lucid learning process, taking risks is indispensable because it's revealing. It allows through the diverse scenarios experienced to develop a form of courage when facing danger, and to grow our self-confidence.

Excesses are obviously to be avoided. Be careful !

Recklessness is when too many risks are taken, and will probably lead to injuries.

The risks proposed have to be well thought-out and always adapted to the level of the participants.

. Confront and tame affects (emotions and feelings).

Not to let them overflow us. During training sessions of course, but also and especially during exercises that require us to get out of our comfort zone (*Embu, Shiken*, etc.). This search of a form of equanimity in situations intentionally stressful comes out of a long personal work of confronting and taming our affects.

. Know your needs – *Ware-tada-taru (wo)-shiru*.

These words of moderation, simplicity and sobriety seem welcome to counter-balance the world of today in which too much is often perceived as just enough, and enough, often perceived as insufficient.

. Intersect « nothing extra » and the search of the right measure with each of the great classic concepts in *Jō, Mokuso, Rei, Kihon, Kata, Ukeru, Te no Uchi, Kamae, Shi-sei, Sei-chū-sen, Me-tsuke, Ma-ai, Sun-dome, Ha-suji, Ri-ai, Aruki-kata, Tai-sabaki, Jun-jo, Sei to dô, Ki-ai, Ki-ken-tai-ichi, Zan-shin, Ko-kyū-hô, Ki-musubi, Is-shin, Mu-ga-Mu-shin, Yo-yū, Hyō-shi, Kō-bō-ichi, Nin-gi-rei-chi-shin, Kata ni shitagau*, etc.

To each, then, to make their own of this short maxim « nothing extra », whose breadth and implications open a multitude of fields of application for our martial study and practice.

ⁱ « From here comes our habit to say in speaking of a masterpiece, that it's impossible to add or remove anything from it, meaning that excess and lack of, both destroy perfection, while mediety preserves it », Aristote, *Nicomachean Ethics*.