

# Hitting the Target

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I can hear the sound of arrows racing through the air, bowstrings being plucked, and arrows hitting their target. I was in my *dojo* watching my teammates shoot arrows one after another. As the arrows hit the target, people outside watching shout “Yoshi!” to encourage the archer. Can you guess what I am talking about?

When I joined my *Kyudo* club, I was very excited to start shooting arrows, but every day my head coach told us only to clean the club room and straighten our shoes. I wondered when he would teach us real *Kyudo* skills, but he only warned us to speak in honorifics. I didn't think there was a bigger lesson to be learned.

Two things are great about learning *Budou*, Japanese Martial Arts. First, you can learn self-discipline. For example in *Kyudo*, the opponent is a target that doesn't move, which means that to hit the target you have to calm your mind, control your breathing, and stay focused. It is a fight with your inner self, and learning this personal discipline is not easy.

Secondly, by mastering strict manners you foster modesty and humility. Throughout the world, Japanese are said to be very polite and courteous, and the reason is because *Budou* has been a fundamental part of Japanese society. For example, respect for the elderly and our superiors, and hating to be ashamed are all aspects studied in *Budou*. These are virtues we still honor today.

In *Kyudo* club, the new members still hadn't even touched a bow or arrows, and we continued our repetitive tasks to the point of boredom. One day, my master discovered my neglect and told me to quit and go home. It felt so unfair and I objected, “You aren't teaching us *Kyudo*! Why do we have to do all these silly tasks?” He responded, “A person without basic manners does not have the right to learn the way.” I was shocked, but it wasn't until after I started shooting arrows that I realized that through all those repetitive

tasks my coach was training my emotional strength and giving me focus.

Later, I realized *Kyudo* is bigger than just shooting arrows, the lessons it teaches about personal discipline and social manners can be applied to life. For example, outside of my *dojo* my concentration increased and I got better at studying math and science. Also, now when I go into public I often see signs warning people to do things which, as a martial artist, I already do without thinking. For example, keeping your shoes straight, taking care of your personal belongings, and cleaning up after yourself. Wouldn't it be nice if we all left public places cleaner than we found them?

Manners and self-discipline is a very rare and valuable thing. In order to preserve this tradition, we should return to *Budou* and understand the spirit of Japan's traditional culture. Even though the Japanese government has taken action by adding *Budou*, such as *Naginata* and *Judo* to the national curriculum, true mastery takes years of dedication and perseverance. I'm going to practice harder than ever in *Kyudo* so I can continue to hit my target in practice and in life.

Thank you for listening.