

The Johna Effect

by: Thomas C. Salander

During the months prior to December 31, 1999, many people put in thousands of hours preparing computer systems for the change to the year 2000. Operating systems were replace and tested, then new compilers installed to work with the new operating systems. Sometimes hardware was replace and the cycle of testing started over again. Applications were reviewed and tested. Some were modified, others replaced. New applications — the fun stuff — were put on hold as more effort was put into ensuring the first day of 2000 did not look like 1900.

When the end of the year arrived vacations were canceled, holidays postponed, party invitations declined. Many people found themselves watching a computer screen instead of the television in the largest accounting of mass overtime since World War II. All the work was done, the preparations made. If it wasn't enough or wasn't right, people were ready to do whatever was necessary to keep their system running.

And nothing happened.

In the weeks that followed, many self appointed experts weighed in with their after-the-fact analysis. Most of these people know less about computers than the average home e-mailer. It was a big mistake, they said. They accused the digerata of crying wolf, of not knowing what they were doing, of being incompetent. The worst was the suggestion that it was just a hoax, a pathetic — and successful — plan to bilk their employers and the public out of billions of dollars in overtime, bonuses, and new hardware.

No one said, "you got it right".

Most people, Christian or not, have heard of Johna and the whale. Far fewer know or remember what got Johna into that unfortunate position in the first place. Johna was sent by God to Nineveh to warn the people of impending doom. The “great fish” incident was just part of the recruiting strategy.

Eventually Jonah did go to Nineveh and warned the residents. They repented; so did God. Jonah’s reward was, in effect, to be run out of town.

The reason we get into martial arts vary. Some of us were looking for an exercise class at the Y but Jujitsu was the only thing available at the time we were able to attend. Others of us saw one too many Bruce Lee movies and decided to give it a try not knowing the difference between Jet Kon Do and Jujitsu. Some of us were sent by our parents; others were desperately grasping for something that would restore our self-confidence after surviving a brutal physical attack.

No matter what the reason for starting, after years of attending classes many of us find our reasons have changed. While we attend the same classes, our interest has expanded beyond Jujitsu or Judo or Aikido. We have begun to learn Budo.

One aspect of this idealized western interpretation of Budo addresses physical conflict. My own instructor put it this way: the ultimate expression of the art is to never have to use it. Ninety percent of the time we spend in class is the physical preparation for the ten percent of the time all else fails. Ten percent is just a guess. The more we study, the lower we expect that number to be. The more we study, the better prepared we are if the numbers fail us.

The problem with this approach is dealing with the outside perception. There are few movies about martial artists that do not have the hero eventually wipe the floor with the bad

“ After years of attending classes many of us find our interest has expanded beyond Jujitsu or Judo or Aikido. We have begun to learn Budo. ”

guy (Ang Lee's "Pushing Hands" was an exception; it was not a box-office smash). Hollywood goes for the flash, the rush, the flurry of kicks, punches, and acrobatics. If there is a node to the tortured plot it is to push the hero into a fight (a dead teacher or sibling are popular plot devices).

Avoiding a fight does not sell tickets, so the public view is skewed by films and the posturing of sports competitors. Truth is, a martial artist who is unwilling to fight at the first or third provocation is, in the general public's view, a wimp.

...which we can handle. But the Johna Effect has another side. At the end of the story Johna was not just annoyed at how others viewed him. Johna was far more angry about the power that was not used. After "all that" — nothing happened.

For those of us who practice martial arts there is the real battle. We battle public misperception of what we do and how we respond to circumstances. More important, and perhaps the soul of our practice, we battle ourselves. We recognize that, like Johna, part of us wants to lash out and use the outward skill that we have spent years developing. We recognize it and we control it. This is the essence of Bushido — this is the "way". This is also what goes unseen. It is the internal strength, the self acceptance, the discipline. It is what makes the true martial artist unnoticed.

It is why we practice.

Copyright © 2000 Kokoro, The Budoshin Yudanshiakia.

Reprinted by permission.

American Jujitsu Association

www.AmericanJujitsuAssociation.org