



# ZenQuest Martial Arts Center

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An Okinawa Karatedo Association, Demian Mata Jiu-jitsu Network and Siyodtong Boston Affiliate

## NEWSLETTER April 2024

### Martial Materialism Part I Distractions from Inner Growth

In the realm of martial arts, there exists a concept that can be called 'Martial Materialism.' Also known as 'spiritual materialism' in endeavors like Yoga or meditation, this is a tendency for some practitioners to focus on external achievements and status symbols rather than personal growth and development. This phenomenon raises important questions about the true essence of martial arts practice and the balance between external prowess and inner transformation.

It's normal for us to process the world through our 'ego' or the part of our minds between our conscience and sub-conscience. Our ego generally makes it possible for us to interact with our world, and provides us with a sense of self-esteem and self-importance. As 'normal' people, we need our ego as a defense mechanism against potentially threatening aspects of reality. Part of personal development in the martial arts is letting go of our ego and finding more inner calm and peace. Although we can refer to this as 'spiritual' development, it is not intended to be in conflict with the spiritual aspects of one's religious beliefs.

Martial arts, rooted in ancient traditions and philosophies, have long been associated with philosophical and spiritual teachings. Practitioners are often drawn to the martial arts not only for physical fitness and self-defense but also for the opportunity to cultivate virtues such as focus, discipline, humility, and self-awareness. However, in the pursuit of belts, trophies, and recognition, the essence of martial arts can sometimes be overshadowed by these external markers of success.

One of the pitfalls of martial materialism is the emphasis on rank and hierarchy. Many martial arts systems have belt-ranking systems that signify a practitioner's level of skill and experience. While these systems can provide structure and motivation for the student's advancement, they can also lead to a focus on attaining higher ranks for status or 'ego gratification' rather than genuine mastery of the art and personal growth.

Related to the distraction of rank is focusing too much on advanced techniques or extreme training. Martial arts programs will typically have a progression of material as students gain experience. Students focus on fundamentals early in their training and learn increasingly more difficult strategies as they go. It can be tempting to view learning advanced strategies as opportunity to look down on lower level students. Some students will actually make it their mission to learn advanced strategies before mastering those on a lower level just to upset the established hierarchy and advance their own external progress. Likewise, some students will try to make their training more extreme than others for the same reason. All of this can become a diversion away from personal development. Another example of this is the practice of 'Kobudo' or classical weapons. Too often in the western world this

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## Lights, Cameras, Action

Many of our students and parents will remember when we had a fitness room between our two training rooms. This room had some fitness equipment in it like treadmills, a stationary bike, a squat-rack, a weight-bench, a variety of weights, etc. There were also shelves and hooks in that room for storing different targets used in classes. The room also served as a place where family members or prospective students could watch classes at times.

During the pandemic most of that fitness equipment was sold off because the gym was in financial survival mode. Once we were able to reopen (following a four-month closure), that room was used as a place for students to hang jackets and place shoes. At that time there was one-way traffic through the building and students would exit from the side door in the fitness room. Once we were able to go back to our normal mode of operation, we were faced with a choice of rebooting the fitness room, or simply converting the space to additional training space. With classes busier than ever, we chose to incorporate that space into the back training room in 2022. Unfortunately, eliminating the fitness room also meant that people would no longer have a place to easily view classes.

As an alternative we are now in the process of creating a situation where classes can be viewed electronically. So, we will soon have a camera in each of the training rooms and a video monitor in our reception area. Parents and prospective students will be able to watch classes in real-time from the comfort of the waiting room. This is a closed system which cannot be shared or published anywhere except at ZenQuest. We expect the system to be fully functional by the end of this month.



## Advanced Concepts News

On Saturday, March 16 ZenQuest held another 'Advanced Concepts' clinic for Uechi-Ryu Karate. After touching on training and instructing, the seminar focused on advanced targeting in serious self-defense situations. Senseis Connie and Mark used an exercise known as 'Seisan Bunkai' to highlight vulnerable areas of the body and the effects of striking them in different ways. These clinics are for ZenQuest's Uechi-Ryu students ranked Brown Belt (Nikyu) and higher.

AC clinics for Muay Thai, and Jiu-jitsu are scheduled as follows:

**Sityodtong Muay Thai** (for 2-Stripe White Prajiet and above) -- Saturday, April 13

**Demian Maia Jiu-jitsu** (for Blue Belt and above) -- Saturday, April 27

These are scheduled to begin at 1:15 PM and each last about 90 minutes.

ZenQuest's Advanced Concepts clinics are a great opportunity for our intermediate and advanced students to learn and practice advanced techniques and strategies in their respective art(s). These are provided to enrolled students at no extra cost. All eligible students or those receiving special invitation are encouraged to attend. **Attendance is not mandatory, but is considered for advanced promotions and instruction roles.**

**IMPORTANT DATES**

4/7, 1:30 pm - Kyu Test  
 4/13, 1:15 pm - Advanced Muay Thai  
 4/27, 1:15 pm - Advanced Jiu-Jitsu  
 7/21-7/28 - 2024 Kikai Camp

**NEW STUDENTS!****Welcome:**

Torre Tamez, Acadia Lacey,  
 Konstantine Collins, and Nico Ennis-  
 Bernal

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**

Kelsey Koldys 4/2  
 James Ladd 4/4  
 Borey Booker 4/9  
 Beth Yanuskiewicz 4/9  
 Logan Polk 4/9  
 Victoria Artega-Tucker 4/10  
 Chris Siemonidis 4/11  
 Tyler Fogg 4/12  
 Aarav Bansal 4/12  
 Elliott Dascanio 4/15  
 Brennon Stockton 4/16  
 Maxwell Polastri 4/17  
 Tony Kennedy 4/18  
 H. Alsdorf 4/21  
 Isaias Ramirez 4/23  
 Jeffrey Daignault 4/25  
 Ed Pezze 4/27  
 Simon Wineberg 4/27  
 Lillian Huh 4/28

**RECENT PROMOTIONS****TIGERS:**

8kyu - Cole Sawyer, Lincoln Ladeinde, James  
 Horth, Mason Goodrich, JJ Hastings  
 9kyu - Gavin Tedesco, Ryan Tedesco

**DRAGONS:**

4kyu - Ben Chagnon  
 5kyu - Beckett Lyon  
 8kyu - Ella Piretti

**COBRAS:**

3kyu - Zooey Bayles  
 7 kyu - Victoria Artega-Tucker

**UECHI:**

3kyu - Aaron Kollmer  
 4kyu - Lucas Kunde  
 7kyu - Matt Winter

**JIU-JITSU:**

3-stripe white - Robert Inesta  
 1-stripe white belt - Jared DeLuca, Chris Boyle

**MUAY THAI:**

2-stripe white - Chalice Mitchell, Borey Booker,  
 Elijah Southard  
 1-stripe white - Amanda Saunders

**Terminology****Distraction**

Japanese: Kibarashi  
 Brazilian: Distração  
 Thai: Kwam Fungsan

**“Best Martial Arts Academy”  
 ZenQuest Martial Arts**

*Berkshire Eagle's  
 Readers Choice Awards  
 SEVEN years  
 running!*



# NAGA Springfield

On Saturday, March 30th four ZenQuest students took part in the 2024 NAGA championships in Springfield, Massachusetts. Each member of team ZenQuest medaled, bringing a total of six medals back to the gym. Individual results were as follows:

- ◆ **Ryan Thebeau** - 3rd Place in Men's/ 150# Max./ Novice/ No-Gi.
- ◆ **Elias Casey** - 3rd Place in Men's/ Beginner/ 190# Max./ No-Gi
- ◆ **Shawn Chambers** - 3rd Place in Men's/ Beginner/ 170# Max./ No-Gi, AND 3rd Place in Men's/ White Belt/ 170# Max./ Gi
- ◆ **Philippe Peligrad** - 2nd Place in Men's/ Novice/ 180# Max./ 30+ Years/ No-Gi AND 2nd Place in Men's/ White Belt/ 180# Max./ 30+ Years/ Gi

Everyone on the team fought well and had moments where they really shined. In addition to the four competitors, several team members came out to support them. Thanks to the competitors for an amazing job and thanks to everyone who showed up to support them!



(Continued from page 1) **Martial Materialism**

becomes nothing more than a power or ego trip for the practitioner, with little value in self-defense.

Other examples of martial materialism pitfalls are:

**Elaborate Gear & Products** - A variety of gear and products can be used when practicing a martial art. This can include uniforms, 'no-gi' equipment, sparring gear, accessories, specialty drinks or food, etc. Although it can be fun to get high-end or extravagant stuff, students should not become preoccupied with this and stay focused on their training. Students should base their gear and products on what will enable them to train well.

**Culture Crazy** - Martial arts can come from different parts of the world. Although it's fun and enriching to learn the terminology, history, and culture related to a martial art, students shouldn't focus so much on this that it detracts from their training and progress or let this become another way to think of themselves as better than others. Students should never indulge in 'cultural appropriation' or reject these aspects of a martial art. The cultural aspects of a martial art should be shared and enjoyed with others in a positive and constructive way, but always be second to physical and personal development.

**Power Trips** - Sometimes students who have gained significant experience over a period of time will take on a role in helping with classes. This, too, can become about ego gratification or a power trip rather than just helping others learn. Students who take on a role in teaching martial arts need to realize the critical importance of setting an example and being a role model for the personal development aspects in that journey.

**Exclusive Cliques** - Although we can make amazing friendships in the dojo, we need to be careful not to let that get in the way of training. When friends or groups of friends make a practice of excluding others from their interactions it can be a huge distraction for themselves and others...especially if they're causing drama in the process. Students can enjoy their friendships in the gym without forming cliques that detract from the overall team comradery there.

**Hero Worship** - Another example of martial materialism is the tendency for some students to focus too much on notorious figures or 'heroes' of their art. These students may see opportunities to meet or train with these people as another elevation of their own status. Some of these students will actually tend to identify more with these heroes or their team, and start to look down on their primary instructors and team. This will not only delay their personal growth, but cause dysfunction in their home gym training. This is also super disrespectful towards the people who probably provided them with the opportunity to meet some of these hero figures in the first place.

**Words Get In The Way** - Personal development comes from immersion and focus in training. Although it can be helpful for students to keep a journal or notes about their training and experiences this, too, can actually be a distraction. Notes are good for reference when practicing new material away from the gym, but should be discarded once the student doesn't need them. Similarly, making a habit of talking too much in class will block personal development, too. In the modern era, social media can also become a place where focusing about training and accomplishments can contribute to this aspect of martial materialism.

Check back next month as we look at ways to combat these distractions in part II of 'Martial Materialism.'