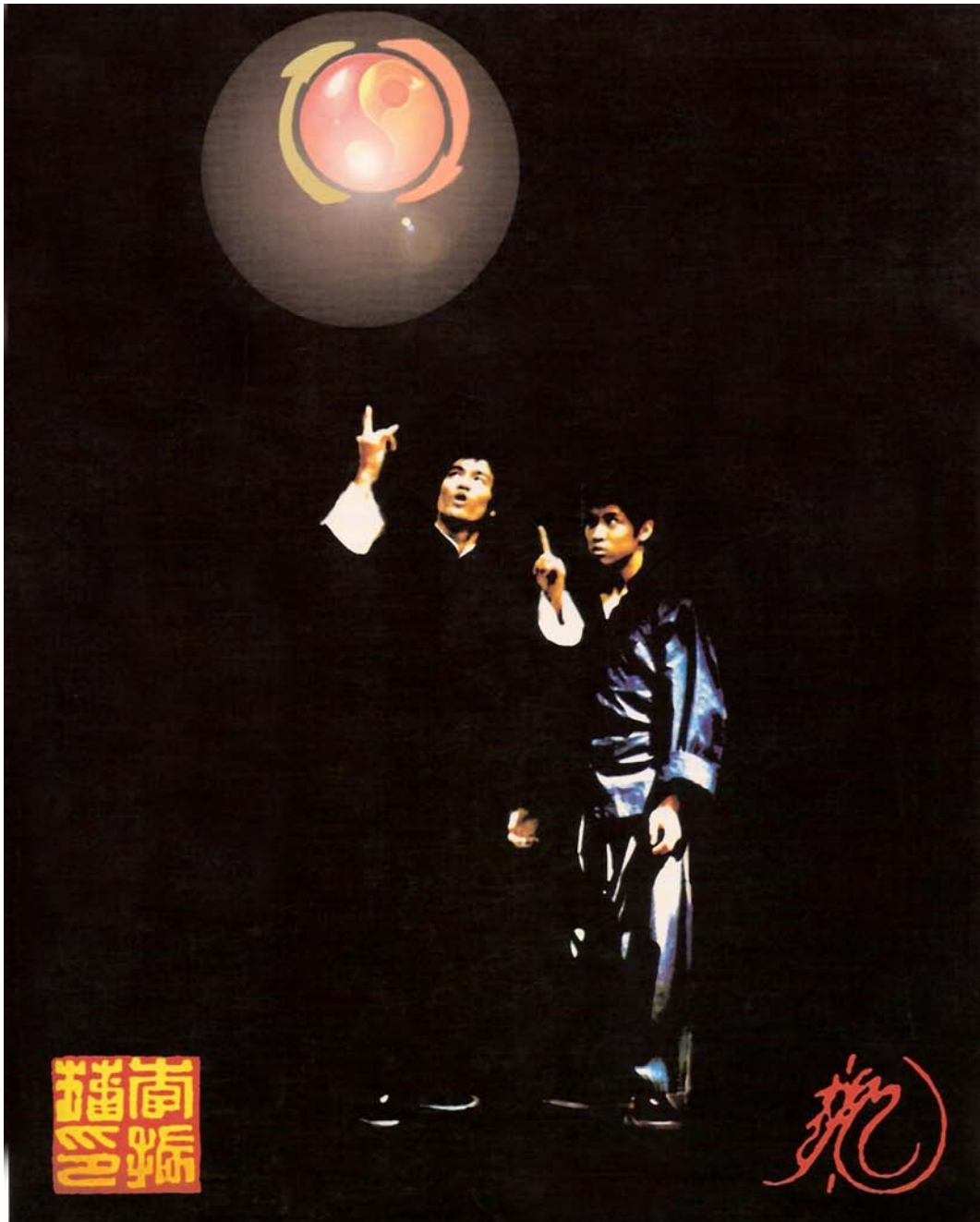


The Tao of Jeet Kune

(Or Closing the School in Order to Teach Students)

By John Little



Presented by Chris Kent

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Introduction



I have had the privilege of knowing John Little since 1996, and consider him a good friend. Personally, I consider him one of the most knowledgeable people on the planet with regard to both Bruce Lee's art and philosophy of JeetKune Do, and a trail-blazer in the world of strength training and fitness.

When John resided in Boise, Idaho, and was working on material for the Bruce Lee Foundation, we got to spend a lot of time together, not only working on BLF projects, magazine articles, etc., but also simply hanging out as friends with our families. During this time we had countless conversations regarding Bruce Lee, his art and philosophy. John also graciously presented two talks on these subjects to both students and guests at my school, the Kent Institute of Martial Arts. Linda Lee Cadwell also attended the talks as a special guest.

When I approached John with the idea of creating a pdf article from the talk for people interested in JKD to read, his response was, "Yes, by all means!"

The following is the transcript of one of those talks. It was later printed as an article in one of the issues of the JFJKD Nucleus' "Bruce Lee Magazine."

THE TAO OF JEET KUNE (Or Closing the School in Order to Teach Students)

Bruce Lee was unique among martial artists for reasons far deeper than simply his physical prowess.

For one thing, at a time when he enjoyed a position of being the most famous martial artist in North America, he REFUSED to open a chain of schools - which, in all likelihood, would have made him a millionaire many times over. Second, when he was preparing to make a film (*The Silent Flute*) that would have added immeasurably to his already high profile in the martial arts world - he CLOSED his schools.

I believe that if we take a moment to examine the "whys" and "wherefores" underlying his decisions in both instances, we will come to understand Bruce Lee's thinking a little better, and, by extension, we will come to understand all that blossomed forth from it: his acting, his relationships, his choice of reading materials, his approach to choreography and directing, and, of course, his martial art.

That his skill in martial art was, as Han pointed out in *Enter the Dragon*: "Extraordinary" is self-evident, this is why we still appeal to Bruce Lee's example as the "gold standard" of martial achievement: he epitomizes what is possible for a human being to achieve in artfully "expressing the human body." What is less evident at first blush is the fact that Bruce's skill in combat, was the result of the direct application of his research into the human sciences of motion, force-production, fitness and conditioning, kinesiology, physiology and physics - from his intellect and comprehension of these disciplines, in other words, than from the mere "rote" performance of martial techniques.

In fact, Lee used to laugh at this popular image of the would-be martial arts student who would ask his instructor: "When are you going to show me the SECRETS?" Bruce said:

"If there is a 'secret,' you will have lost it by looking for it." In other words, the time you spend in looking for the "secret" or the "how to be a holy-terror in five easy lessons", you could have been putting into your own training - and hard work, practice, practice and more practice - is the secret.

It was, then, the result of applying the mental to the physical, rather than simply adding physical to physical that resulted in Bruce Lee's achievements. For, as any student of yin-yang philosophy or electronics will tell you: you can only create something positive by adding negative to positive; positive to positive leads only to negative. Applying therefore "yin" (mental/negative) energy to "yang" (physical/positive) energy results in the creation of something, new, something positive, and something "complete" or "total" in development - such as Bruce Lee.

I'll only touch on yin-yang and its underlying principle of "Tao" briefly here: According to Bruce Lee, there was nothing mysterious about Tao. His definition of it was simply "the ultimate truth" - the real, enduring truth - rather than the various expressions of it (which are

manifestations of yin-yang energies). Tao is the well-spring, the primal energy from which all things in the universe come into being and ebb and flow in their own unique ways. It is the source from which all things originate and is revealed in every rock, brook, tree and human being. Each is but a personal expression of the Tao. As Bruce said:

"Remember, the whole is evidenced in all parts, but an isolated part, efficient or not, does not constitute the whole."

(page 177, Artist of Life)

Bruce Lee sought out the ultimate truth of martial art but he discovered that he could only do this by acknowledging that he was simultaneously learning more and more about himself. Because he discovered, as his son Brandon did many years later, that as you pursue the mastery of the martial arts you will inevitably encounter barriers to your ability to progress towards this goal. These barriers will be your limitations – both perceived and physical – your physical ability, your problem-solving ability, your reasoning, how you handle defeat – and success as well. All of these experiences teach you as much about yourself as about the goal you are pursuing.

The Search for "Root" Essence

This is one reason why those who claim to be practitioners of an "eclectic" martial art are missing the side of the barn by at least eight yards. Eclecticism in martial art is simply the random stockpiling of styles or techniques according to fleeting fancy or personal tastes. What Bruce Lee did was seek the ultimate truth of "combat- its "Tao" or "root.." He was not concerned with whim or passing fancy, but the "root' of enduring truth. As he said:

It is futile to argue as to which single leaf, which design of branch, or which attractive flower you like; when you understand the root, you understand all of its blossoming.

(page 23, *The Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, Ohara Publications)

Eliminate not "clear thinking" and function from your root.

(page 349, Jeet Kune Do: Bruce Lee's Commentaries on the Martial Way)

What we are after [in JKD] is the ROOT and not the branches. The root is real knowledge; : the branches are surface knowledge. Real knowledge breeds "body feel" and personal expression; surface knowledge breeds mechanical conditioning and imposes limitation and squelches creativity.

(page 385, Jeet Kune Do: Bruce Lee's Commentaries on the Martial Way)

The root is the fulcrum on which will rest the expression of your soul; the root is the "starting point" of all natural manifestation. If the root is right, so will all of its manifestation.

(page 385, Jeet Kune Do: Bruce Lee's Commentaries on the Martial Way)

It cannot be that when the root is neglected, what should spring from it will be well-ordered

(page 373, Jeet Kune Do: Bruce Lee's Commentaries on the Martial Way)

The “Li” Principle

And so what Bruce Lee sought with the tool of JKD - which you can define as "the search for truth" or the search for reality" was to seek the root that underlay the expression of effective HUMAN combat. There is a Tao or ultimate reality of everything; which reveals the organic nature of the thing in question. The Chinese call this organic nature "*li*" and it originally referred to the markings in jade, the fibers in muscle or the grain in wood. There is a "*li*" of human nature, human thought - and human combat. No matter what the living species, there is a way that is their ultimate nature and a way that it can be realized. There is such a nature pertaining to how a tiger, a crane, a dog or a cat is best equipped to fight and survive - and there is also a such an ideal of how a human being is best suited to fight. And this ideal lies deep within the root of our very nature as human beings.

However, everywhere Bruce looked within the popular martial arts front he saw people obsessing not on discovering their own natures in such matters, but rather on which "branch" or decorative "leaf" was the "best," never once pulling back from surface matters to see the root or underlying principles that ultimately defined and empowered them. They looked to cultures and regions within those cultures for answers, rather than to the common root of their humanity.

Bruce admitted that he, too, was guilty of this when he was younger. And that it was only after he began to mature in his thinking (although he would hasten to point out that he was always in a process of "maturing" - never matured, and an "actualizing martial artist, not a master"), that he began to see the folly of such superficial thinking.

When I was teaching my Chinese system of gung fu, I had a system then. Upon my arrival in the States, I did have my 'Chinese' Institute; but since then I no longer believe in systems (Chinese or not Chinese), nor organizations.

(page 158, Artist of Life)

In searching for "ultimate truth" - first of martial art - and then of himself (only to discover that ultimately they were one and the same thing for "all knowledge ultimately means self-knowledge"), Lee learned that the defining attribute of human beings was their mind or "intelligence." As he says:

Unlike the lower animals, human beings are indeed intelligent beings" and "it is the creative ability of a human being that separates him from all other animals.

(Source: aphorism # 105, Digest of Striking Thoughts)

So let us now look to the "root" of the "mind" that Bruce Lee spoke of. Let's follow him as he takes the key of JKD with him to unlock the ultimate truth of martial art.

Holding to the root-truth that "martial artists are human beings first" - and that "Nationalities have NOTHING to do with martial art," we can now understand why - if you'll allow me to say such things -- "Korean Karate," "Chinese Gung Fu," "Japanese Bushido" are by definition terms of restriction and segmentation. They - as their titles imply -- only allow you to see the branches or individual leaves. As Bruce told journalist Alex Ben Block:

More and more, I believe in the fact that you have two hands and two legs, and the thing is how to make good use of yourself-and that's about it. "Styles" kind of restrict you to only one way of doing it and therefore limit your human capacity.

(Source: Page 63, Bruce Lee: Words From A Master)

Please consider the following observation made by Bruce Lee:

*In traditional martial art being wise seems to be a constant process of accumulating of fixed knowledge -like a first-degree knows **SO** many sets or techniques, a second degree a little more; or an X-brand martial artists - a kicker - should accumulate Y brand's hand techniques, or vice versa [this is the so-called - "eclectic approach" so defined. However, Accumulating fixed knowledge does not necessarily bring about truth [which, remember is Tao or the touchstone of ultimate reality]. Truth comes to us when we understand personally the whole process of working on our being. No amount of fixed knowledge or "secret teaching" can be compared to clarity of understanding. Patterns, doctrines, and **SO** forth, touch only the fringe of martial art. **Its core lies in the human mind, and, until that is touched, everything is still superficial and uncertain.***

(Page 149, Artist of Life)

So there is far more to Lee's art than simply accumulating martial art techniques and fighting. As he once said:

Remember that a martial art man is not merely a physical exponent of some prowess he may have been gifted with in the first place.

(page 172, Jeet Kune Do: Bruce Lee's Commentaries on the Martial Way)

*As he matures, he will realize that his side kick is really not **SO** much a tool to conquer his opponent, but a tool to explode through his ego and all its follies. All that training is to round him up to be a complete man.*

(page 172, Jeet Kune Do: Bruce Lee's Commentaries on the Martial Way)

Another touchstone of Bruce Lee's philosophy is freedom. And not freedom from without to within, but rather from within to without. Many people speak of freedom in politics as being simply "less government" - "less restrictions on ME," "less demands on ME," "Less taxation on ME." Bruce Lee saw that if we focus solely on external entities, we would - to quote him directly - come to:

see ourselves as instruments in the hands of others and thus free ourselves from the responsibility for acts that are prompted by our own questionable inclinations and impulses.

(Source: page 240, Artist of Life)

Bruce Lee saw a more immanent freedom we needed to acquire - freedom from ourselves. From our expectations of ourselves, from all of the events and experiences that had conditioned and molded us into what we are. Not what we really are - but who we think we are: all of the overly self-conscious attitudes we drag around with us like a ball and chain; our fears, our hang-ups, our insecurities - our fear of being different from the "group."

"What man has to get over is the consciousness of himself," - so said Bruce Lee in a taped telephone conversation with student Daniel Lee.

And as society is the projection of the individual upon the group, we can only change society, government, policies, etc., by first changing the "root" that society is based upon. If you wish better society, first have better citizens. As Bruce Lee said:

We start by dissolving our attitude -- not by altering outer conditions.

(page 362, Jeet Kune Do: Bruce Lee's Commentaries on the Martial Way)

And how do we do this? By applying the tool of JKD, the "search for the ultimate truth," only this time to the "root" of our very being, which, according to Bruce Lee was to ask the question "How Can I Be Me?"

This internal search leads each individual to search within their hearts and souls to discover - ultimately - that they are their own source of ultimate authority.

It is not a question of developing what has already been developed, but of recovering what has been left behind - although this has been with us, in us, all the time and has never been lost or distorted except for our misguided manipulation of it.

(Source: Artist of Life, page 198)

Scratch away all the dirt our being has accumulated and reveal reality in its is-ness, or in its suchness, or in its nakedness, which corresponds to the Buddhist concept of emptiness.

(Source: Page 197, Artist of Life)

In other words, Bruce Lee's philosophy accepts you as you are. It does not seek to change you, rather it seeks to help you explore yourself – admittedly a deeper self than your ego may now allow you to believe exists.

For this reason, it is not a philosophy or belief system “on the make.” It is instead, a mirror in which is reflected the real you. The bottle the medicine is in – martial art – is not as important as the medicine itself. The instructor’s role is like that of any good physician – to help you get better. And to realize that, as Bruce said:

*The medicine for my suffering
I had within me from the very beginning,
But I did not take it.*

*My ailment came from within myself,
But I did not observe it.
Until this moment.*

*Now I see that I will never find the light
Unless, like the candle, I am my own fuel,
Consuming myself*

(Page 113, Artist of Life)

It was this understanding that made Bruce Lee decide to close his schools. The Ultimate authority on everything in life - including martial art - is you. You empower the art, the art does not empower you. After all, as Bruce Lee said:

That liberating truth is a reality only insofar as it is experienced and lived in its suchness by the individual himself, and this truth is far beyond any styles or disciplines. "

(Page 152, Artist of Life)

And:

A style should never be the gospel truth, the laws and principles of which can never be violated. Man, the live, creative human being, is always more important than any established, set style.

(Page 13 5, Artist of Life)

And (again):

*No amount of fixed knowledge or "secret teaching" can be compared to clarity of understanding. Patterns, doctrines, and **SO** forth, touch only the fringe of martial art. Its core lies in the human mind, and, until that is touched, everything is still superficial and uncertain.*

(Page 149, Artist of Life)

So why have a school then? A valid question. In one respect, there exists no need for a school. If you see this truth - and can apply it on your own - then all is well. But what of those who cannot? What of those who still experience a gnawing feeling of personal unfulfillment? What of those who have lost their way and cannot get back in touch with themselves? Or those who wish to fully actualize themselves in all aspects of their humanity - i.e., mental, physical and spiritual? Training is required as the trigger mechanism for the internal process of discovery and self-knowledge - like the Buddhist ferryboat that is necessary to get one across the river - if only to be discarded on the other side. And, in truth, all of us are subject to the vicissitudes of life, that can from time to time erode our more powerful insights - unless we are able to keep ahead of the curve; to keep pace with life's changes so that we can "change with change." Even the Buddhists have their *Sanga* (brotherhood) where they strive for - and seek to maintain - the transcendental state that led them to the experience of *satori* or *bodhi* or *Nirvana* (enlightenment).

I liken Bruce Lee's art and philosophy to the optometrist, rather than, say, the Guru. The guru tries to procure members for his organization. Members help to support him financially, pay off the mortgage on an expensive building, keep the Lear jet fueled up, and generally "belong" to the guru, boost his membership and thereby prove by sheer weight of numbers the veracity of his creed. The optometrist, on the other hand, hopes to cure you of your dependency upon him; to get you, through the use of a corrective lens, to see reality more clearly. Bruce Lee's art is very much like the corrective lens in the optical testing machine in the optometrists' office; whereby they sit you down in the chair and ask you questions about yourself: *Does it look clearer with this lens or with this lens? Looking at life from this perspective or that perspective? Looking at combat from the part - or from the whole?* And guess who's answer is the deciding one? YOURS. You decide. And, once you see things more clearly, you're on your way.

Similarly, Bruce Lee's art doesn't seek to "own" you, nor to "possess" you. It only seeks to help you to explore yourself physically, mentally and spiritually -- by correcting the astigmatism of self or ego that is blinding you to seeing and actualizing your true potential as a human being. That being accomplished, you have no further need of the "ferryboat" that has brought you from the shore of ignorance to the shore of transcendence.

And so, in Bruce Lee's thought, using his words and teachings as a touchstone in our lives, we are inspired to question, to form our own judgments and to set our own standards of truth. We have before us the example of how another human being - human being, mind you, not a god - was able to avail himself of a fuller, richer, more meaningful existence on this planet through altering his level of perception and looking at life in a new and exciting way. And that is where training in Bruce Lee's art can prove to be very helpful.

Unlike other arts, JFJKD bears in mind that the end is not "mechanical efficiency" or the ability to "*fill time and space through some sort of organized movements.*" As Bruce Lee pointed out, "*machines can do that.*"

(pages 166-167, *Artist of Life*).

JFJKD realizes that your physical movement is your soul made visible. Indeed, as Bruce Lee said:

By martial art, I mean, like any art, it is an unrestricted athletic expression of an individual soul... martial art is ... about unfolding [of] the bare the human soul. That is what interests me.

(Page 239, *Artist of Life*)

The JFJKD practitioner is also made aware of the fact that:

*In the practice of JKD, there is no set or form, for JKD is not a method of classified techniques, laws and **so** forth, that constitute a system of fighting.*

(page 172, *Artist of Life*)

What confuses people is that – as Bruce Lee points out:

It does employ a systematic approach to training, but never a method of fighting.

(page 172, *Artist of Life*)

A good JKD instructor is, therefore, a guide to his students, not the “keeper of secret information.” How can there be when the "secret" to the whole thing is within you and not your instructor? The instructor knows this only too well, having awakened to that fact himself after many years of training, and so he sees himself as a midwife to the birth of your discoveries and growth toward personal freedom as a fully actualized human being. You see, as I mentioned off the top, it's about so much more than fighting; it's rounding you up to be a complete and total person; to become a man or woman of "Tao." For, as Bruce Lee said - and this shall be my final quote from Bruce Lee for the evening:

To be a man of freedom is more important than to be a great fighter.

(page 166, *Artist of Life*)

The conformist declares: "I believe it because others believe it." The non-conformist, just as irrational, says: "I don't believe it because others do." That rare, third person, the self-actualizer, declares, "I believe it because I can see for myself the reasons why it is true." Bruce Lee was this rare "third" person. I hope that through the study of JFJKD, you will come to be one, too.

Thank you very much.



John Little

John Little is considered one of the world's foremost authorities on the life and work of Bruce Lee, his training methods, and his philosophy. John has been the only person authorized by the Bruce Lee estate to review and use the entirety of Lee's personal notes, sketches, and reading annotations. He edited a five-volume series of books on Lee's material. In addition, John served as the associate publisher of Bruce Lee magazine, the managing editor of Knowing Is Not Enough, the official newsletter of the JFJKD Nucleus, and as a director of the non-profit Bruce Lee Foundation.

In the world of strength and fitness training, John Little would certainly be considered an iconoclast. Recognized as "one of the top fitness researchers in North America", John has exposed and laid to rest many of the myths, lies and fallacies that surround the world of bodybuilding and fitness training. Utilizing scientific principles instead of following tradition and dogma, he is the innovator of three revolutionary training protocols, including Max Contraction Training. A prolific writer, John has authored 12 books on exercise and 38 books on philosophy, history, and martial arts. In addition his numerous articles have been published in every fitness and martial art magazine in North America.



Chris Kent

With over 40 years experience, Chris Kent is widely acknowledged as one of the world's foremost authorities on Jeet Kune Do, and has gained international recognition for his knowledge and leadership in perpetuating the art, training methods, and philosophy developed by the legendary Bruce Lee. As a teacher, professional consultant, and speaker, Chris has traveled the world, teaching and sharing the benefit of his expertise in the art and philosophy of Jeet Kune Do with thousands of people.

Chris has authored 3 of the highest rated books on Jeet Kune Do: *The Encyclopedia of Jeet Kune Do*, *Jeet Kune Do - The Textbook*, and *Jeet Kune Do Kickboxing*. In addition he has both written for and appeared in countless martial art publications both nationally and internationally including *Inside Kung Fu*, *Black Belt*, *Martial Art Masters*, *Budo International*, *Combat* and *Martial Arts Illustrated*. He has also written and produced 3 series of training videotapes and DVDs which remain the standard of the industry. His latest book, "*LIBERATE YOURSELF! - A Guide to Personal Freedom*" and "*P.L.A.N. - Personal Liberation Action Notebook*" detail how individuals can apply the philosophical tenets of self-actualization utilized by Bruce Lee to their own lives.

Chris was a one of the co-founders of "The Bruce Lee Educational Foundation", a non-profit, organization created for the purpose of perpetuating Bruce Lee's art and philosophy for future generations, and for 5 years served as a member of the Board of Directors.