

Discipline

Many young fencers, I have a feeling, are offered the chance to take up the sport because it is thought that fencing, like other martial arts, will impart some notion of discipline into these rebellious individualists we sometimes refer to as “kids”.

And so it may be; but what exactly is discipline? Is it a process that will cause us to get whacked or grounded or otherwise penalized or punished if we do not follow orders? Is it that thing with which we are threatened if we don't clean up our room when told to or we don't hand in a term paper before some deadline? What exactly is discipline? Is it a good thing? A bad thing? Some invention created for the sole purpose of not getting the kids what they really would like for Christmas (a sort of counterpoint to the “Holiday Spirit”)?

We know from the Latin root of the word that it has something to do with being a student of some kind; a disciple, really is nothing more than an apprentice, whose main job or reason in life is to learn whatever it is that the master has to teach. Socrates had his disciples, and Jesus, and Freud, etc. And these apprentices had to prepare themselves to receive all the intellectual goodies their master wanted them to learn; and if they did prepare themselves well, they showed discipline.

Likewise, the young fencer who goes out of his/her way to do extra lunges or point-control drills, who compartmentalizes his whole day in such a way that every exercise he/she needs to perform so as to become a great fencer has its own slot... that young fencer shows discipline, teachability, desire to learn.

Wow! So that's it? Discipline is just willingness to learn? Yep, but it goes farther than that; discipline will make us do all the little things and some not so little that will enable us to learn better and progress faster in our quest for knowledge...

Maybe Fencing can teach us Discipline; but can Discipline teach us Fencing? You bet!