



Episode 271 – Q&A Number 5 | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hello! Thanks for tuning in whistlekick Martial Arts Radio episode 271 and we have our 5th installment of the Question and Answer series. I'm actually really excited for this one because for the first time, I didn't have to ask for any questions. Quite often, we'll get questions and, you know, they're shorter questions, they're more personal questions to me. But this time we have four amazing questions that have come in just over the last couple of week from folks who are okay with and actually encouraged me to answer them as part of the show. This is something that I've wanted to see happen and I feel like we've finally reached that point. It's exciting for me because when you all write in your questions, it means that you're going to be interested in the answers. This is something coming from our wider martial arts and podcast listening community. It allows for different perspectives rather than just what's coming out of my head and selfishly, it means a little bit less work for me. Alright, there are other formats that we're playing with right now, involving research. So let's get into it. I am not going to say too much about who the people are, obviously I have their email address. Most of them I have their full name, I'm just gonna drop a first name in. Let's get started with the first one.

This question comes in from Mark. It says, hi Jeremy, I've been enjoying your podcast for a while and I have to ask your opinion on a recent tournament. I'm a 42 year old blue belt, 4th Kyu, in Shitoryu Karate in somewhere under somebody. I learned 3rd Kyu in Karate



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as a teen and did some full-contact kickboxing in my 20's. A couple of years ago, I started training again and started again as a white belt. Recently, I was in a small tournament through one of our smaller Dojos in a rural town. In my division, there was myself, 4th Kyu, a greenbelt, a 6th Kyu, and two orange belts, 7th Kyu. For those of you that might not be familiar with the way Japanese systems number they tend to go down as you get closer to blackbelt and then back up. So, a 4th Kyu is actually a higher than 7th Kyu, little bit relevant here. The orange belts, one had a visible physical disability and one had a mental disability. This gave me a great feeling of respect for the disabled athletes and when it came time to spar with them, most of my techniques were 50% speed and I may have given a couple of free points. There's a smiley face. At one point, I contemplated giving the match away. I was thanked for taking it easy but on the other hand, I was told that all technique should be full power and speed but with control. Just as I would spar with another person of the same rank. What advice do you have on sparring against physical or mentally challenged individuals? As I said, I have the utmost respect for anyone who is able to overcome their disabilities and train, and I never want to disrespect any martial artist regards, Mark.

Mark, I'm gonna put it out there pretty bluntly, you did the right thing. And the person who told you that you should be sparring at full power with someone else, that the way you tempered that power is solely with control, is wrong. Whenever you work with someone, you need to take everything you knew into account - their physical size, their skill as a martial artist, their abilities as a human being, and the context of the environment. I am not going to spar a... Well, here's a great example. Over the weekend, the Taekwondo School I attend, we had a large testing. And one of the people testing was a 13 year old boy who I've known since he was six, great kid, love him to death. The way I spar him typically is not the way I sparred him when the instructor asked me to at the testing. Because the context was different. I was asked to push him a little bit more. I also sparred him at the testing very differently than I sparred the 40-something year old man who outweighs me by 100 pounds who was testing for his blackbelt, as well. Neither of those folks received full power. Neither of those folks received full speed because I am not going to risk injuring someone because of my control. I'm going to go as hard as it is warranted assuming that I miss. Because I will miss sometimes. I will not be able to pull a technique because the person I'm working with, sparring with, messes up. They step in on it when they thought I was retreating, something can happen. So in this specific example of the way you handled it, it sounds like you handled it well. I feel that when we work with someone that is of, let's say, lower overall ability - that can account for age, rank, time, physical capacity, all of those things - we should always be pushing people a little bit. Because that's how we get better. We get better when we are not the best person in the room - many of you have heard me say that on the show before - so we have to give people something to encourage them. If someone believes that where they're at is, you know, at a 10, maybe we give them an 11 or maybe it's a 10.1, right? You have to gauge



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that situation and I would rather that we err on the side of caution especially when it's someone that you don't know well. There are all kinds of things, all kinds of factors that play into this. Now reading your email, it seems like you felt like you did the right thing and the words of one person made you question that. Well, based on the bit of emotion that's coming through in the email, I think that you did the right thing and I think you know that. Now if you had the opportunity to spar with one of these gentleman again, maybe you kick it up a little bit. Maybe you get to know them over time and you're giving them a little bit more. Because at the end of the day, as far as I'm concerned, what is competition designed to do? It's designed to improve your skill and give you something enjoyable. I often ask students coming out of a competition, did you learn something and did you have fun? It sounds like you had fun and it sounds like you learned something. How to work with lower ranks, people of different abilities, different schools, all that, that's learning something. So as far as I'm concerned Mark, you did the right thing there.

Next question's from Scott. Jeremy, I'm reaching out to you about something that I've been thinking about a lot lately. I also feel like you could use this topic as a potential Thursday episode basis - hey cool, thanks. I've been thinking about titles in the martial arts in general and specifically of me accepting the title of Sensei. For background, I'm an assistant instructor at the Taekwondo School I attend and I'm working towards a full instructor soon. This is in addition to being very near the completion of my level one instructor certification in my style of Kenpo. I guess this revolves around basic questions that I'm thinking about. If someone is an instructor in two schools, does that not make them a Sensei? The general definition that I think of Sensei is simply teacher. I do teach students of my own; I'm their Sensei, right? However, I also struggle with the thought process of taking on a title and the potential ego problem, **08:05** problem that can go with it. This would be similar to someone who is a doctor. One doctor may only use it in official settings, another may insist being referred to as Doctor all the time (massive ego). I strive to keep my students from mystifying me as if I'm extraordinarily wise and knowledgeable. I'm pretty confident I put my pants on the same way as everybody else. I've just been doing martial arts a little longer, is all. I often tell them stories of my mistakes and failures past and recent to help them work through their current struggles. How do you feel about the titles of Sensei? Seeing as you do use it at least in an official sense. I know that you do not seem to use it overwhelmingly through the podcast or through other mediums that I see you on social with. Either way, I don't take lightly accepting or using a title officially in the martial arts. Thanks as always, Scott.

Well, Scott, it's a great question. We talk about titles on the show, it threads through. Sometimes we talk about it in the intros and one of the things that many of you that don't get to hear is the pre-show with many of the guests where we have, often times, five minute conversations about title and how I'm going to introduce these people. For the most part, quality skilled martial artist is at least outside of the formal structure of training,



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do not use titles. Some do, I've known people who, just as Scott used the example of a Doctor, wanna be called Sensei or Grandmaster or whatever when they're at the grocery store. That's fine if that's what works for you, if that's what is important to you, go for it. But I don't want to dig too deeply into the broader idea of rank, I wanna answer Scott's question specifically. Because if we go too deep, then it's gonna be long. It's gonna be a long conversation. And it's one that I'm not 100% ready to talk about because when I start to think about it, honestly this is a subject that has been sitting in the list of subjects for 2 years. And every time I pick it up, I struggle to have that conversation with myself and have you all listen in a way that is not blatantly offensive. I don't want to offend anyone and I don't mean offense when I think about my own personal views. But some of my personal views seem a bit abrasive on the subject so I just haven't done it yet.

SO let's talk about Scott's question. The basic question I'm thinking about, if someone is an instructor in two schools, does that not make them a Sensei? The general definition that I think of Sensei is simply teacher. I do teach students on my own, I'm their Sensei, right? Okay, whenever we talk about any title, title is a word. The word has a definition, that definition can vary and the usage of that word can be dramatically different from the definition. To me, the term Sensei, the Japanese term, means teacher. I've also heard other people define it in different ways. One who has come before, you know, an elder, I've also heard more formal lengthy definitions and sometimes that term, that title, can come with certain rank and sometimes it doesn't. I've known people who have used that title exclusively. Though through their entire martial arts, you know, advance rank career, you know, from the time they were 1st or 2nd degree blackbelt up through 10th, I have known people who take the title of Sensei at a 2nd degree and at 4th degree when in their school, in their tradition, they move on to the title of Renshi. I've also known people in Taekwondo schools and other systems who have used the title of Sensei because it is commonly accepted as a martial arts title of someone who is a teacher - perfect example, Sensei Ando. Sensei Ando has talked openly and he's spoken with me in private about his use of the term Sensei when, you know, really he doesn't see himself as a Japanese practitioner. He sees himself as more of a, I believe, a Chinese stylist. Apologies, Sensei Ando if I'm getting that wrong but it's a good example. So Scott, here you are, you are a multi-disciplined martial artist and curious about taking on that title, I think it depends on what that title means to you. If Sensei means teacher, I don't see anything wrong with it. If Sensei means I hold certain rank and you don't hold that rank, then you shouldn't take it. The reason that we introduce guests on the show by their rank is because I'm looking for a lowest common denominator of respect. There are plenty of people that would come on the show, honestly, the biggest names that have come on the show have asked to be referred to by their first name. And with a single exception, there's a bit of trivia for you, I won't tell you who it is, I pushed back. At the very least, we have used, you know, Mr. or Ms. or Mrs. and their last name, sometimes it's Mr. and their first name. You know, things like that, because I don't want anyone to tune in and think, you know, here he is calling



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this very accomplished elder martial artist, someone who's, you know, had a blackbelt before I was even thought of. I don't want someone to look at that and think I'm being disrespectful. So we use it as a term of respect because it's not going to be overly respectful, it's not overly formal in this context. Scott, follow your heart. And my guess, because I know who you are and I know this email, I think Sensei is just fine.

Alright, the next one. Hey Jeremy, going back to that last podcast of yours about anti-heroism, I agree with you 100%. I'm a teacher and a very modest martial artist, I practice Judo and Jiu Jitsu. That subject echoes with me very much. Where I teach, there is that policy that, quote, violence under any form is bad, which means that in case of a physical altercation between two students, the two will be expelled from school. The sentences will probably differ from one kid to the other, depending on who committed the assault and so on, but you got the point. I strongly disagree with that policy. I'm not in any way condoning the use of excessive and uncalled for violence but you know very well that in a situation of self-defense, that policy is absolutely indefensible. That school wrote that they don't condone heroism. English is not my native language but I think I have a pretty good idea of what the concept is. To make sure we're all talking about the same thing, here's some Webster Merriam defines it, and I'm not gonna read the definition of heroism, it's pretty obvious. That boy that I mentioned in the episode, prevented someone being stabbed in his classroom. How on earth can that action not be defined as fulfilling a higher purpose? Didn't that brave act reach a noble end? He did, no question about that. Since some years were a bit harassed by that notion of heroism, you're certainly more familiar about that than me as you live in the US. You can't miss seeing that since the beginning of that new millennium. The most obvious examples of that being the firefighters, and the soldiers - he's referencing 9/11 - probably touching a hot issue here but my opinion is not all of our firefighters and soldiers are heroes. The ones who perish in a building in flames to save people? Heroes. The private jumping on a grenade to save his comrades? Hero. A uniform doesn't give you the privilege to be called a hero. Many men and women also do those jobs for the paycheck. Some join the armed forces for dubious reasons. Some are just nasty people. That boy, the one we're talking about in that episode, that boy did it because he felt it was the right thing to do - playing hero. He prevented a violent act without knowing anything about the intention of the aggressor, at least that's what I got from what you described. Who could have been injured or killed? The teacher, a pupil? If that kid were in my kid's school, I would praise him, thank him, and offer him a warm handshake. School nowadays, like the majority of our institutions, want people and their kids to stay at a place that has been carefully assigned to them. This is why I also completely agree with what you said a couple of months ago about these participation awards but that's another subject, I guess. Thanks for the show, all the best, Jill.

Yeah. That episode got a lot of feedback. I got a number of emails that were comments all over the place, on social media, YouTube... For those of you that didn't listen to it, the



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short of it is there was a kid, picking on another kid, a third kid heard what he believed to be the sound of a knife opening, and he stepped in and defended the smaller kid against the bully. And that kid who was stepping up, who was taking, as far as I was concerned, a heroic act, was expelled. And it created this whole conversation, it was a wonderful conversation. And here's Jill writing in just kinda offering some feedback on it and... My opinion on this hasn't really changed at all but what's been interesting is I've seen some other videos, some other things popping up, unfortunately, since that time we did have a tragic event here in the United States in Florida with a school shooting. And the topic of what is heroic has really popped up and Jill brings up a good point and it's one that is rather unpopular. But I'll admit, it's one that I agree with. Not everyone who puts on a police uniform or a firefighter's uniform or serves in the military fits my definition of a hero. A hero is someone who rises above. And a hero is someone who will do something that may be unpopular, something that is inherently, let's say, risky, for I would say the well-being of others. I've known some heroic police officers. I've been knowing some that were complete dirtbags. And I'm going to guess most people have this as well. The mere presence of a badge or a title does not make you a hero and that extends into martial arts as well. I have known heroic martial arts instructors, people who have gone so far above and beyond in their quest, their goal to teach and share. They deserve that title of hero, most of them. Most are doing because they love it and just because you love something doesn't make you a hero. Thanks for writing in, Jill.

And our last question today comes from Jordan. Good evening, I'll be honest and a little ramble here, my name is, as my email address shows, Jordan. I listen to your podcast for about a year now. I've enjoyed almost all of them, of course, with a few that weren't as exciting as some. But that said, it is only because some of them were more seeming to brag than express their martial arts prowess. I've studied Kung Fu for four years that has been exciting and amazing in its own way. One thing I've learned is that it isn't the art but the practitioner. He mentions a specific style of Wing Chung. So now that there's a little background, so I don't sound like some MMA couch-sitting critique. I've always expressed my love and enjoyment of discussing the views and theories, and of course, the stories. Much like your podcast dive into. But I wanted to ask one question that I, as a martial artist, student and honest human being, have begun to slam into. How can I find the fire to train more than I do? When I first started, I trained between college classes. Showed up before class, started to stretch and sneak in early with permission, of course, at work, on breaks, and outside of my apartment on an old balcony I had. I loved and lived training. Now, I might get in for 2 days a week and my mind then fights me with the dissatisfaction of where I stand now versus where I was before. No ability to learn has disappeared only dulled. But like a dull ability, the flame in my life for training has waned. I do all I can to get back in but every time I start, either working interferes or have family emergencies and life literally doing all I can to keep me from my training. What, as a martial artist and typical person has been through this, can I do to give myself motivation, inspiration, and



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desire again? I ask because my instructor's so stuck in his mind of trying to bring in money that sometimes he forgets that I can't pay for class if I can't work. The ever ending fight these days between students, rates and teachers and that when he forgets, I become discouraged and agitated and I don't want to go back. And when I do go into train, we have students now who have no respect for the school or the teachers. And that builds up a fire so strong that it's nearly impossible to not decide to stiff-arm or blow a technique in training to put the younger students down to make them realize they're not as tough or good at their abilities as they may assume. So that's a secondary question, I guess. What can I do to defeat both of these internal battles? Your opinion would be greatly appreciated.

Alright, Jordan. So I see two things here and I'm gonna answer both of them. The first one, it sounds like you want a different martial arts school. I'm going to encourage you to find a different school to check out. I don't say that very often, but just reading between the lines here, it really sounds like you have lost some respect for the culture at the school that you're training at. And I think that that is really the heart of both of these issues. But let's assume that it's not. Let's assume that you were just feeling unmotivated. And we've talked about this on the show a number of times. If you're feeling a lack of motivation, it's probably because you have an expectation that is different from reality. Often times when people start doing something, they throw themselves into it, they're really passionate about it because they can see a lot of change. They see a lot of change very quickly. We see this in martial arts, we see this in physical fitness, we see this in a lot of other sports. People get excited about things. Now you may not be one of these people but I'm sure you know someone who has embraced something, jumped in with both feet and very, very quickly, fades out. I know people who have a pattern of this, I'm thinking of one person in particular. Whatever they're doing, they're all in until they're out. For some people, that's the way they're built. I think that there are ways around that but I think it comes back to expectations. When we start doing something is when we see the most progress. The greatest adaptation, we're talking about something physical if we think about in terms of physical fitness. Let's say, you're never done any strength training. And you go to a gym, and you start doing some strength training. And in the first couple of months, you're gonna get really strong. But it's not going to continually progress at that rate. In fact, the strongest people in the world are the ones who developed a strength the slowest. Because they've been doing it for so long. Now those that have continued to progress are not simply doing it because of goals. There not simply saying, well I wanna lift x-amount of weight or I want to learn such and such form in my training. There doing it because they love the process and if you love the process and you're tying the process to a love for yourself, you're more likely to find motivation. One of the things I've said on the show and we've actually, recently, no that episode hasn't come out yet, somebody that I interviewed recently, even articulated it in a slightly different way which was really validating to me. I've often said, there are only two motivating forces in the world - love



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and fear. When we do something, we do it because we love something or someone, or we fear something or someone. If your training is for any reason other than love of yourself, you will not be as motivated as long. To love the process of training and what it does for you as a human being is the number one motivation. It is the most sustainable motivation for your martial arts training. There are days that that isn't what I need. There are days that I go and I train because I love the people I train with or I love working with the children in the kid's class before I take the adult class or I love seeing my instructor because he's become a good friend and an important person in my life. I work hard to find the loving reasons to do something versus a fear of regression or a fear that my instructor will think poorly of me or a fear that my friends will advance and I won't be able to keep up with them. Fear creates distance, love creates closeness. If you want to stay close to martial arts, find the love for martial arts however that manifests for you. Thanks Jordan, I hope that answers your question.

If you have a question for me related to martial arts, a past episode, write them in, please. Super fun when I get to answer these because guess what, we're coming up on, you know, this is gonna be a 25-plus minute episode, longer than we usually get to do for Thursdays and I didn't have to do a lot of work. So indulge the laziness? That's not the right word, the efficient, there we go. Indulge the efficient side of my personality and send me some emails. We're not gonna do this every week, that's for sure, but you know, if we'd ended up doing one of these a month, I think that would be a lot of fun. The best way to get those questions to me, email me directly, [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). Don't forget, check out [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com) for all of our products. We're rolling out new stuff. If you guys haven't been over and checked out some of the new apparel we're doing, oh my gosh. You should really check it out. We've got some fun, cool stuff. We're testing new things, you know, check it out once a week or so. You know, we're seeing what's working, what's not working, and I've got some fun designs out there - newer colors with gear over the last few months. We are, let's see, we are in the midst of prototyping other types of gear, I'll let you guess what those are, uniforms are in progress, yes I'm whispering that. Yeah, it's getting good over here, folks. [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com), [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) and you can email me, [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). I'm so happy with today's episode, I hope you enjoyed it. Send me some questions. And if you hated this, well, you got what you paid for.

Until next time. Train hard, smile, and have a great day.