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Technical and Martial Training

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To train technically is to focus upon one or a few given tactical elements per technique. To train martially is to consider all tactical elements simultaneously. To be more specific, to train martially is to consider all technical elements in relation to each other and to the various states of mind or spirit that act upon those elements. Therefore, and because Aikido waza are meant to function as a whole, true technical understanding can only occur at a martial level. Only the whole can help us truly understand the parts.

This is not to say that there are not things that are learnable at a technical level of training, or even to suggest that technical training is a wasteful pursuit. Aikido practice must always include both technical training and martial training. Aikido practice must always include the isolation of fundamentals for the sake of magnifying both the means and significance of acquiring key details, and Aikido practice must always hold the acquiring of these details to the standard set by the overall functioning of a given tactical architecture. However, because of its capacity to simultaneously address the whole of our being and the whole of the tactical elements involved in any given technique, martial training should remain the prominent aspect of our practice.

Only martial training will force us to reconsider, rediscover, and reconcile with whatever insight we may have gained through our technical training. In fact, martial training will refine all technical insights to a point so fine that all insights gained prior to martial training will seem more akin to ignorance than to wisdom. This is because technical insights do not reach their full fruition until they have been practiced and analyzed martially – as part of an interdependent whole. As an example, let us look at how the strategy of aiki might be applied to the tactic of levers within both technical training and martial training. Let us also note some of the differences that may make themselves prominent over the span of one type of practice or another.

As one of its traits, aiki warrants that we should seek the path of least resistance. At a technical level, the path of least resistance is often subjectively experienced as using little or no muscle in order to accomplish one's desired end. This is particularly true when we are dealing with levers. As such, it is quite common to see "high level" practitioners, and/or demonstrations of technique offered as "high level," and witness little or no muscle energy being utilized on the part of nage. Under such conditions, one's skill in applying aiki to mechanical levers is qualified according to how little force one has to employ in order to have the lever in question maintain its operational status. Under such parameters, it is quite common to neglect several aspects that make up the matrix for any truly viable tactical architecture. Such things as Angle of Cancellation, Continuous Motion, Control Maintenance, etc., become secondary in terms of determining

skill and/or accomplishment. Only the success of the lever in question and its specific engine of operation (i.e. little or no muscle) come to determine what is done and what is not done. Alternatively, at a martial level, the path of least resistance is not marked by the absence of one's musculature. Instead, the path of least resistance is marked by the ease at which one can apply the whole of one's muscular system. In reference to our musculature and the path of least resistance in regards to employing levers, this is a subtle but profound difference between martial training and technical training.

As a result of this difference, in martial training, the concern over whether one can apply the whole of one's musculature compels us to consider many more elements relevant to the application of aiki in regards to levers – elements not always relevant to the technical application of aiki. In technical training, while avoiding overt muscular exertion, the path of least resistance may make use of levers only cosmetically. That is to say, levers often only become significant matters of concern geometrically speaking. Their overall effectiveness is often not measured and thus their workload capacity in the end is not conducive to their status of being deemed effective or ineffective. Naturally, the potential for such a perspective to regress into a state of martial retardation is great. This is because skill is being disassociated from overall effectiveness and instead being linked to isolated matters of architecture.

To be sure, the point of technically training with levers is to balance them in such a way that a minimum amount of mass and/or energy is enough to trigger them toward one's desired mechanical advantage. Since overt muscular exertion is often avoided in technical training when applying aiki, one often employs only the weight of one's arm, and/or even less mass, to the working side of a given lever. As a result, the capacity to address the potential need for more energy and/or more mass is often neglected. What may have first been the minimum amount of energy necessary to operate a lever often then becomes the maximum amount of energy possible. This often occurs, for example, because the delivering of the mass of one's arm does not physically necessitate things such as Directional Harmony, Body Fusion, Back Up Mass, Body Alignment, a sturdy but dynamic Base of Support, and/or any other tactic relevant to bringing the whole of one's mass to a given point of contact or action.

In the end, and but for the extremely self-disciplined, elements equally relevant to the efficient delivery of the mass of one's arm and the mass of one's entire being come to be edited out of the training session. At this point, since it is not required to have one's body in a strategic position capable of delivering total mass, and/or capable of addressing the whole of the opponent's offense and/or defense, and/or the whole of his/her athleticism, we often neglect to cultivate many of the tactics that do indeed mark the skilled as martially skilled. Instead, we settle for merely identifying a decrease in the strength used as a sign of potential martial application. In a way, this is like taking a marker or a rain check for martial skill.

Naturally, martial training also seeks to achieve levers that are balanced in such a way that a minimum amount of weight and/or energy is enough to trigger them toward one's mechanical advantage. However, not defining the path of least resistance by the absences of one's athleticism, martial training warrants that one place the whole of his/her being upon such levers. As such, more elements have to be simultaneously considered. For example, take the Base of Support: Wishing to engage solely the weight of one's arm, or even less mass, does not require the same quality in Base of Support as does the attempt to engage the whole of one's being. Because overall one is generating less force at the point of engagement when only employing the mass of one's arm, the reactionary force is also lessened. Therefore, one's base of support can be quite mobile, even fragile, and still often suffice in generating the bracing angle necessary to achieve the desired end of engaging a minimal amount of weight at the point of contact. Because in technical training a single component is being isolated from the greater whole, there are seldom any negative consequences to having a fragile Base of Support. In this way, one generates a series of

relationships that work only to decrease or diminish the value of every single element involved. In particular, decreasing the amount of tactical elements we are addressing (i.e. emphasizing the lever above all else) allows for a decrease in the amount of mass we must engage the lever with, which allows for a decrease in the amount of reactionary force at impact, which allows for a decrease in the stability of our Base of Support, which necessitates a decrease in the amount of tactical elements we are addressing, ad infinitum.

Understanding a given lever from the technical insights of non-resistance offers us only an incomplete, or rather an immature comprehension of the tactic. This is true whether our comprehension is intellectual, physical, experienced, or contemplated. To truly understand, to have a mature understanding of non-resistance as it may pertain to a given lever within a given waza, nage must seek to invest the apex of his/her athleticism, the totality of his/her emotional self, and the fullness of his/her spirit upon that lever. When softness and gentleness are chosen it is because power exists. When power does not exist, and softness and gentleness cannot be chosen, only weakness remains. Therefore, seek the lever that requires but a single digit, and once you have found it, learn to put your whole being upon it.