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Daily Training

by David M. Valadez

All spiritual disciplines have their central practice. While some center on meditation, others on prayer, and still others on various types of asceticism, the center of Budo is training time (i.e. time on the mat). As we may wonder what Zen might be without zazen playing a dominant role, or as we may wonder what a Cistercian monasticism might be without seclusion and austerities gaining centrality, we should wonder what Budo might be should training time not hold a place of primacy.

The primacy of a practice, or the centrality of a practice, cannot come to us by default. That is to say, we cannot claim that a practice is central simply because we do it more than we do any other type of practice. Simply because we train on the mat four days a week and only go the gym three days a week, this does not mean that we have come to understand what it means to truly have primacy in our training. In Budo, mat time cannot gain primacy until it is subject to daily occurrence. It is the same with every other spiritual tradition. Primacy, or the centrality of a practice, does not mean that a given practice merely occurs more than other types of practice. Rather, it implies that said practice occurs everyday. We cannot give primacy to our mat time until we are on the mat day after day.

To be sure, the ins and outs of life make such a level of commitment difficult. Nevertheless, difficulty alone does not forfeit the validity of seeing primacy as intimately connected with daily training. On the contrary, perhaps, difficulty marks the truth of such a connection – since difficulty marks rarity, and rarity always marks spiritual maturity and/or achievement. In this sense, Budo is very much akin to monasticism. As a Zen monk approaches his practice of zazen on a daily basis, or as a Catholic monk approaches his prayer on a daily basis, so too must a budoka learn to approach the mat on a daily basis. Training must become a simple aspect of our lives. It must become akin to bathing, brushing our teeth, eating, sleeping, etc. Moreover, it must gain a type of purity – one that comes to us through inevitability, one that comes to us because training becomes a straightforward matter of what must be done.

To hold Aikido up as a spiritual practice, and then to afford it a kind of special status whereby it would not be subject to the truths that other spiritual traditions must oblige is an odd thing. Throughout history, spiritual traditions have subjected themselves to the position that one's practice must occur daily, must achieve simplicity, inevitability, and purity. This they have done because the law of practicality has proven these things required – this we can see all around the world and within all times. How naïve it seems to suggest that Aikido is some sort of modern solution to an age-old dilemma – where Aikido can be posited as the quick fix, the easy route, the microwavable, “instant,” “half-the-time,” etc. In truth, microwavable

spiritualities cannot be viable. This is because, spiritually speaking, we gain as much from the practice itself as we do from gaining the capacity to perform the practice daily. If we lack the capacity to train daily, it will always be true that we lack a great deal spiritually. This will remain true whether we are aged, injured, have kids, are working, need sleep, in school, have trained for decades, married, are too tired, unhealthy, too busy, live too far away, or bored. Therefore, as we train, regardless of whether we train daily or not, we must confront this aspect (i.e. daily training) of the practice as ideal. Not as an ideal that is to forever remain beyond our reach, but as an ideal that will come to define all that we do and do not do regarding the spiritual cultivation of ourselves through Aikido.