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## **Remaining Powerful in the Face of Options to Remain Weak** by **David M. Valadez**

At Senshin Center, at least by Tuesday morning, the weekly scheduled topic is knowable by all. Occasionally there are minor changes to the topics covered per any given class, but even then, ample notice is usually given. This was quite different from how I trained in the different dojo at which I was a member. Of course, they had the usual divisions between weapons and body art, and/or between those two classes and Iaido. We generally understood when we were set to practice Aikido kihon waza, or when we were set to practice with our bokken and/or our jo, or when we were set to work with our sword. What we never knew ahead of time was exactly what topic we were going to be doing in each class. In short, we came to train in a class that was as far as the topic of study was concerned a surprise.

Feeling that depth is brought to us through the amount of time we spend on a given topic and through the amount of different perspectives we can bring to bear upon a single topic, we have opted to expose ourselves to a detailed breakdown of class structure. There are body art classes, weapons classes, and Iaido classes; we also have atemi classes, ground fighting classes, ARCON classes, spontaneous training classes, knife classes, zazen sessions, etc. We have geared our training curriculum so that the multiplicity of these classes is harmonized along a weekly focus on common tactics, strategies, and/or principles. Through the week, all of the classes are designed to build upon each other. Come Wednesday or Thursday, when we enter the most important part of the training week, the time when classes consist mainly of constant repetition, a dojo member has exact idea concerning what is to be covered at any given class.

As with all things in Budo, knowing what will be covered in a given class can be both a bad thing and a good thing. It is always like this: Budo is always at least two things. Which one it will be, in the end, will be decided by each one of us. It is each one of us that decides what will be and what will become of us. On the positive side, we can see that the capacity to know what is to be covered in any given class is a by-product of the search for depth that we are attempting to gain in our training. That is to say, come the end of the week, we know what topic we are set to practice because come the end of the week we have most likely entered that state where embodiment through repetition is the only goal. Via repetition, we know what we will be covering because of what we have just covered. As I said, this is the by-product of such training. The product of such training is the positive side of this course of action. The product of such training is the capacity to work upon new and/or finer details at higher levels of intensity. This occurs naturally because one does not have to address the concerns and consequences that come via the awkwardness of trying something for the first time.

On the negative side of such pedagogy is the “choice” that comes to us by knowing before hand what is to be practiced at class on any given day. That is to say, for example, if Nikyo has entered that full embodying state of training at the end of the week, because one can, one may come to weigh such specific training against other factors in ones life. Rather than weighing training against ones fatigue level or ones work schedule, one is able to weigh Nikyo itself against such things. At such times, certain rationalizations open up to us; rationalizations we do not have access to when class topics come to us as a surprise. For example: We wonder if we can make due with two or four less hours of Nikyo this week. We ask ourselves questions and search for their reasonable solutions: “Well I've already had three days of Nikyo training, no need to go tonight – right?” “You know, my wrist is a little sore from Nikyo training last night, if I go another day I'm sure it will fall off. I should pass on this morning's class – right?” “Well, I'm not feeling so well today, I'm just a little sick, but it's Nikyo tonight, again, I think I should take the night off - better to get well than just do one more night of Nikyo – right?” In other words, for those that have not seen the value of repetition and how that more than anything leads to depth and maturity in ones expression of the art, knowing what topic is to be covered in class often brings with it a series of options and/or decisions that have to be made. These options and decisions are usually a part of a rationalization that has yet to be identified for what it truly is: a disengagement from the training process for less than honorable reasons.

Through pre-knowledge of what is to be covered, we are given exact options. These exact options can require no specificity concerning the selection process that we make relevant toward them. An example of this is the deshi that comes to train regardless of the topic studied or practiced. This is also the case for the deshi that actively pursues the finer and higher degrees of details and training intensity that come at the end of a week made up of classes that have built upon one another. However, for those deshi that take such exact options and filter them through a specific process of rationalization, the chances for further cultivation of endurance, commitment, and patience becomes reduced. This is because matters like convenience, fear, laziness, boredom, etc., often come to weigh heavily in our thought processes when we have not provided ourselves with enough time and means to purify such tendencies out of our body/mind. Moreover, because of a lack of purification, we are not always fully aware of how these things are weighing in. That is to say, when we opt to miss a class because we have opted to not practice a specific topic, we see only a process of reasonable calculation at work; we see only the innocent asking and answering of some well-placed questions. By such a view, we lose sight of the wisdom contained in the dojo's pedagogy, we lose sight of the true need for the dojo's intended training schedule policy, we begin to wonder about the reasons behind our teacher's courses of action, etc. Little by little, without realizing it, and without truly knowing why, we come to fully alienate ourselves from the entire training process - something the ego was trying to acquire all along.

As Budo is always at least two things, though knowing what is to be covered in class and having that knowledge run through a process of rationalization, we can make ourselves stronger by such a course, if we are strong enough in the first place. In being aware of what topic is to be covered, rationalizing with such information, and still turning away from the likely conclusions that our ego will ensue upon us, we will in the end be working to make us more solid in the Way. Why? Because we will have seen the path to comfort, convenience, and self-gratification clearly, we will have been tempted by it, and we will have chosen just as clearly not to follow it. This is the true upside of knowing what topic is to be covered in class, at least spiritually speaking. It is all a matter of being strong enough to remain powerful in the face of options to remain weak.