



David M. Valadez
Senshin Center
Dojocho

The Practice of Commitment

by David M. Valadez

There seems to be wisdom at work in the idea that one should try something out before committing to it fully or forever. On the one hand, this would seem to make sense: You try it; see if it fits you, see if you like it, if you like it, you do it. However, from another perspective this position may make no sense at all. The belief that one should experience accordance before commitment holds that time is impotent to affect things like correspondence. It suggests that time, through things like change and maturity, plays no role in our capacity to commit to things – when in fact it does.

Time changes everything radically. Yet to look for accordance before practicing commitment suggests that we will or that we should experience things in the same way whether we are at the beginning of our commitment or whether we are well into our commitment (i.e. after decades have passed). It also denies that commitment is more a practice than it is a decision. That is to say, in our commitment, or as part of what commitment truly is, we must continually cultivate our capacity to commit. If we do not come to understand things in this way, our commitment will be no such thing at all. Our commitment will come to be based more upon convenience and impulse than upon discipline and dedication. Of course, one can talk about such things in regards to any type of commitment, for example a marriage, but our commitment to Budo will do just fine as well.

We must realize, in the beginning, one has no chance to experience what one will experience later on in their training. This is a fact that marks one of the very pulses of the learning process itself. This suggests that to base one's decision to commit to training upon an accordance they may or may not feel at the beginning is perhaps more based upon ignorance than it is upon wisdom (as is often suggested). Rather, we must note, early training is not even really about training as much as it is about learning how to train. The first few months are nothing like the point in time three years later, which is itself different from five years later, and that different from ten, and so on and so on. From the perspective of the Art, what one experiences in the beginning is not even a shadow of what one will experience later. In the beginning things do not work, they do not make sense, they do not fit, and most things we simply cannot see or hear though they may be right in front of us. In the beginning, even the most basic things lie far beyond our coordination, our conditioning, and our emotional fortitude. In the beginning, we cannot experience the Art. In short, would have to admit that a beginner is certainly in no position to try anything out, or we would have to admit that "trying something out first," should mean that one is trying something out for a period of at least ten years. At ten years, one gets a decent first picture of the tradition, of the learning process, and of the Art.

When we train, we are training to become someone different, something other from the "I" of today. We are training to change. Because the person having the experience affects the experience, how can we use the "I" of today to judge something over the long haul based upon a moment early on when that something is meant to cultivate an "I" very different from who we are now? We cannot. What Budo is in the beginning is not what Budo will be in the end. When the experiencer has changed, the experience itself will change. Hence, one cannot and should not judge a thing that requires a long commitment by a brief episode experienced at the beginning. Commitment is not about trying something out, or tasting something in the beginning. Commitment is not about beginnings at all. Actually, it is about endings. Commitment addresses the reality of time (i.e. that things change), and the restrictions of personal perspective, by having us accept a broad or general ending as the place to be when our Time has passed. This is the sense of "till death do us part."

The truth of commitment is that accordance comes only to those that are committed. This is because commitment makes all things its own – makes all thing accord. This is the practice of commitment. This is the process of commitment. How then should we approach our commitment to Budo training? Not by trying it out, but by first saying, "I want to be a budoka," and then to work to make all things that come our way as part of this first desire. Only in this way can we mature in our commitment and thus only in this way can we mature in our Art.