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The Rate of Training

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We may wonder, “Do we need to train hard and fast in order to be better prepared for real life situations that are hard and fast, or will slow training always be transferable to such situations?”

One is always going to be able to find examples from both the dojo and from the street when “slow” worked just fine or when “slow” did not suffice at all. The same will be true for “fast.” So let us say that nage’s proper rate of action is always going to be a matter of having the correct timing. In this regard, sometimes nage’s rate of action will be slow and sometimes it will be fast. Correct timing leads to practicality in field applications. Incorrect timing leads to impracticality in field applications. Therefore, “slow” and “fast” are not the determining factors as far as practicality is concerned. This is so in both training environments and in field applications.

Nevertheless, we do not settle the differences that may exist between slow training and fast training by simply noting the relative nature of fast and slow rates of action in regards to issues of practicality. A better understanding of the issues at hand needs to be grasped before we can determine what things, if any, are settled by only one type of training and not the other. Undoubtedly, each rate of training should involve as much from the other rate of training as possible. For example, as slow training may allow for a high degree of attention to detail, fast training should also seek to have this same degree. Fast is not an excuse or a synonym for sloppy. Nevertheless, we must ask, are there aspects, forces, and/or elements, that we simply cannot cross-pollinate each type of training with, regardless of our best efforts?

It does appear that there are some important elements of fast training that are not transferable to slow training, or at least they are not transferable but by the most artificial means. For this reason, if one is concerned with fast and hard situations, fast and hard training should have a prominent place in one’s overall training regimen. Fast training involves types and degrees of physical actions and reactions that can only be present at slower rates of training via choreography. An example of this would be the technique Kokyuu-ho from Tachi Waza. At faster rates of training, the momentum, and inertia, acting upon uke’s body causes uke’s center of gravity to act as a fulcrum – one that uke’s head and feet will revolve around. At slow rates of training, when inertia and/or momentum are reduced and/or even absent from the attack, uke’s center of gravity does not by nature act like a fulcrum. Because such physical forces are reduced and/or absent, it is often up to uke to choreograph the topsy-turvy effect of Kokyuu-ho’s throw. While to be sure this is a great reduction on uke’s own skill development since their sense of receiving still carries with it a sense of reacting and not of “in the moment” result, nage’s skill development is more negatively affected. Nage is facing not only the same reduction in skill development, but he/she

also becomes for the most part unaware that any reduction is taking place. This occurs whenever a key architectural element of a given tactic is subsumed by an uke that is primed to react to nage's movements. As uke subsumes such key architectural elements, nage comes to presume that he/she has the capacity, skill, and fortitude to ensure the presence of such elements. This in the end reduces training to being a matter of hope, or a matter of assumption, as opposed to being a matter of knowledge.

Certain energies are only present and/or more amplified at higher levels of intensity. They simply cannot be reproduced accurately or fully in "lite" training no matter how insightful uke may be in their choreographies. Things like timing, distance, sensitivity, blending, etc., are not complete in their training until these higher levels of intensity and the energies that accompany them are experienced and reconciled. (Note: This is all outside of things like adrenalin dumps, etc. - which are real factors in and of themselves.) Whenever energies are not present and/or not amplified to the point where suitable tactical solutions becomes reduced to an appropriate few or one, nage will not have put in the necessary mat time for appropriate skill development in regard to these forces. Hence, skill acquisition will be incomplete in terms of issues of practicality regarding hard and fast attacks. This formula of how exposure alone leads to skill development is at the heart of the maxim: "Train as you fight, fight as you train." Moreover, while we should not understand this maxim as an overly simplistic prescription for scenario-based training, we should see, in terms of how exposure relates to skill development, its logic does indeed make up the very substructure of Aikido's overall learning process. A nage that only trains slowly will not simply be a nage that does not train fast. He or she will be a nage that has not given themselves the capacity to develop key skills against likely energies because they did not expose themselves to such energies in their training.

To be sure, slow training will always have its place in training. For example, slow training will always be the primary method by which learning curves can be addressed. However, learning as a whole is not fully settled by slow training. The exposure to particular energies and our capacity to address them adequately demands that we make these energies present in our training. We cannot cultivate what we do not invest in; we can only reap what we sow. We cannot train for momentum and inertia, for example, when we guarantee its absence or reduce its presence to an irrelevant level.