



David M. Valadez
Senshin Center
Dojocho

Budo and the Joy of Work by David M. Valadez

Though we may often be distracted or bombarded into doing otherwise, there should be no person who does not seek to obtain a kind of joy that is fulfilling and complete. As self-preservation in animals is a natural instinct, the search for meaning, for peace, and for joy, in human beings is equally innate to our own state of existence. This search is very much a part of our own drive toward our own special kind of self-preservation. Innate or not, however, things like joy, fortunately or unfortunately, do not come to us "naturally." That is to say, these things come to us only through human endeavor - through praxis – through work.

While many of us may feel that we all have an inalienable right to joy, no matter what our definition of joy may be, it is commonly understood that one must work toward one's own joy. Even the joy of witnessing a spectacular sunset from a mountain view requires that we first climb upwards. Whether our definition of joy includes a sense of spiritual attainment, or materialistic gains, or just a broad realization of one's hopes, one cannot separate the connection between work and becoming joyful, no matter how much one feels something such as "joy" is deserved.

In contrast, we can say, if one does not put forth much effort, whatever it is that may be grasped because of a given action, it cannot be said to be very fulfilling and/or complete. In fact, the results gained from half-hearted actions often instill a feeling of having been deceived and/or cheated - even of having deceived or having cheated oneself. Still, even fully comprehending that there exists a relationship between such a universally felt thing as joy and work does not guarantee that we will actually labor for such things. In modern times, the tendency is to prefer an "instant" and "easy" way of obtaining things. This modern way of being has even plagued the ancient traditions of Budo. We must be on guard against this ever spreading dis-ease. For if something so widely felt as joy requires work, then we can only imagine how much labor is actually necessary to receive the virtues of martial arts training (e.g. honor, wisdom, courage, integrity, etc.)

It is said, during the days of the samurai, a warrior that was on his way to the battlefield would often pray the following invocation: "May the seven evils and the eight pains fall upon me." How strange this must sound to our modern ears! Such a prayer was an acknowledgement on the part of the warrior, a showing that he knew that all positive human virtues come not from easy paths, but from paths paved with trials and tribulations. By clearly understanding this, such a samurai was actually praying for the virtues themselves - those deemed valuable by him and his profession.

Let us examine this idea of laboring and/or working as it plays a role in the cultivation of the Self in Budo training. While it is quite true that training should never become a negative disruption in our life, it is not correct then to assume that training, or laboring, or working, will not involve such tried and true self-cultivation methods as dedication and renunciation. In fact, dedication and renunciation are the primary elements or tools that we must use to make our Budo training "deeper." They are the positive and negative forces at work in making oneself present on the mat at any given moment. Dedication actively seeks to foster commitment in all of one's states of being (i.e. thought, speech, and action). Renunciation actively rejects any element in one's thought, speech, and/or action, that may distract or lure one away from the path of work. While we may all have different and acceptable levels of dedication and renunciation, the depth of our training is nevertheless directly proportional to our level of dedication, which is directly proportional to the amount of renunciation we practice in our life as a whole.

When our training includes these two elements, it can be said that we are training from the heart/mind. In today's terms, when looking at a person who is training from the heart/mind, one may say he/she is "in the zone," "focused," "fully present." You cannot just decide to be "in the zone," you must practice it. In other words, pertaining to making decisions, you can only decide to practice being "in the zone." The sought after result is merely the incidental of an a priori required praxis.

Today we may pray to God for guidance and for other things, but this is not the prayer of the warrior. The two differ in that the warrior was not praying merely because he was in a state of distress and/or to relieve the tension of such a state. The warrior of old did not pray as if he was wishing for things. Nor did he directly ask for the virtues he sought. Knowing that they are his for the taking - things that only he can give to himself - he was sure to ask for only what could be given to him from outside himself: The chance to obtain them.

Many of us believe that it is possible to take a Budo "crash course". The martial arts of today make great financial profit by catering to the delusions of the public when they say their art is "easy to learn," "natural and simple", and/or "quickly learnable." Even Aikido is not free from these perversions. We must resist the temptation to learn our arts easily. For only when we match our enthusiasm to learn with earnest/hard work do we truly follow the path of Budo. In short, our training should always have an element of, to use a euphemism, discomfort. If this discomfort is not present, then like the warrior of old, we should pray for the trials and tribulations that will bring it to us.

