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“Founder did” Does Not Mean “We do”

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It is not reasonable to use the Founder's life as a legitimating factor for weapons training or its absence. What the founder did cannot be considered contemporarily relevant as an argument for either course of training. As Budo is a path of oneself for oneself, spiritually speaking, meaning it is not a path of worship, it seems a bit “off” to ask within Budo training, “What would Osensei do?” like some do with the bumper stickers that say, “What would Jesus do?” The Founder’s practice should not legitimate anything in our own practice. It is one thing to be informed concerning the Founder’s life, it is another thing to throw away the position of self-reliance for the social or cultural assurances of facsimile. Art is not about tracing or copying. Art is its own justification; art is self-legitimizing. We should be thus in our training of the art of Aikido.

I am not one to say that we should not take sides concerning what role weapons training should play in our overall practice. Moreover, we should not withhold all reasonable judgments concerning either side for fear that they may lead to exclusion one way or the other. Instead, we can measure the utility of weapons training according to the locally specific results of weapons training. That is to say, as with all things, we can simply look at the specific situations where weapons training is taking place, or not taking place, and see if such a presence or absence is truly producing what is being sought for within the ideals held by that place. In that way, we can of course wonder about why some weapons systems in Aikido cannot compare to other weapons systems being practiced outside of Aikido. We can even wonder if the rationale of positing some Aikido weapons systems to be just about body movement truly does excuse it from tactical critiques and/or considerations since all valid tactics themselves are housed in proper body mechanics. Moreover, we can also wonder why in some dojo it takes a piece of wood to get one to truly move in their Angle of Deviation – why can’t the handsword that just spilt your forehead open do the same, or why aren’t handswords that can split your forehead open ever being thrown at dojo that do weapons? Etc.

The point of doing away with the polemical use of the Founder’s life is to provide ourselves with a clarity of mind. With said clarity we should look to accept given rationales as they are stated or repeated in regards to training curriculum. That is to say, we should not outright reject a position because it is not our own. However, after we accept a position as given, we should investigate further to see if those practices that are attached to these given rationales are consistent both in terms of method and in terms of result. Universal rejection or universal acceptance has to be avoided either way.

To ground one's training in the training of another, to say, "I do this because he/she did that," is to turn away from the Path of Self-Reliance, it is to make Budo shallow while given it the appearance of depth. When an aikidoka picks up his/her sword, or when they choose to lay it down forever, that aikidoka should know why at the very core of his/her being. Knowing why at the core of one's being means being able to, or at least being willing to, address all like things that are relevant and all unlike things that are relevant. It thus means taking responsibility for one's own position – not shoveling it off on some other person and then aiming all of one's efforts to uplift that person to a point that is beyond question, beyond reflection, or beyond reconsideration. On a Path of Self-Reliance, those efforts, or the energy of those efforts, are better spent asking oneself more questions than it is giving out the same old tired answers. This seems particularly true concerning the "how," "why," "what," and "when," of weapons training in Aikido.