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Greenhouse Aikido

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When reflecting upon the practicality (both martially and spiritually) of our Aikido training, we are not assuming that Aikido waza is outright architecturally inefficient. Such a premise denies the fact that Aikido waza are not particular to the art. All of Aikido's tactical architectures can be found in other arts. They are located in arts that range in orientation from making it exactly clear that they are about martial applications to arts that openly state they have absolutely nothing to do with the latter. It is wise then to move beyond architectural considerations and to then consider our training models when we reflect upon the overall efficiency of our practice. Doing this, one thing stands out. For the most part, for most aikidoka, the bridge between Shu and Ri is severed. That is to say, most aikidoka today have no means, traditional or otherwise, to travel from form to spontaneity in their training. Stuck in form, they not only remain impractical in their applications of the art, they in fact become antithetical to practicality itself.

When Ri is absent from our training models, or worse, absent from our training imagination and aspirations, whether we are dealing with valid tactical architectures or not becomes a moot issue. When we are stuck in forms training, our practicality is limited to the constructs of ideal situations – situations that have often been so idealized for purposes of instruction that their actual manifestation outside of the dojo becomes rare or impossible. We are bound to fail in our practical applications under any kind of conditions that fall outside of Shu training, while we are geared to only succeed under conditions that we will almost never face. This puts the odds in favor of defeat and failure. This means that when ones training is restricted to, preoccupied with, or dominated by forms, one is training towards defeat and failure, and perhaps even worse.

It has been said that Aikido should answer to other Budo. When we say this, we are not saying that we have to cross train in other arts - though that does have its place. Rather, it implies, following Musashi's position, that we should know the Way of other arts so that we can come to know our own Way even more so. Ri, or the transcendence of a given art, is the true manner by which arts come to know themselves as they come to know other arts. All arts meet in Ri. Arts, or practices, that are stuck in Shu, dominated by Shu, limited by Shu, etc., are arts that we cannot come to know well because they are arts that prevent us from knowing other arts. In such traditions, Shu training becomes like a type of greenhouse. Such traditions become a place where one can cultivate types of plants (i.e. tactical architectures) that simply cannot grow anywhere else. Like feats of genetic engineering that are driven by the personal preferences of the botanist, such architectures are less a part of Nature than they are a part of it. As such plants would fail then outside of the greenhouse, in the real world, so too does such tactical architectures. Because there is an intimate relationship between the body and the mind in regards to spiritual cultivation, when our training is reduced to greenhouses, so too are the elements of our supposed spiritual

maturity. That is to say, as our waza are viable only within controlled situations, so too is our Wisdom, our Compassion, our Love, our Faith, our Honor, our Loyalty, etc. As our techniques become reduced to ideals, we become fair only in fair-weather; as we become satisfied with reducing our training to abstractions or ideals, so too do we become satisfied with our fair-weather “spirituality.” In the end, we must challenge ourselves to move beyond Shu training. We must center ourselves around Ri. We must resist the temptations and the distractions that our own ego and the ego of others put in place to deceive us into believing that (and acting like) form is all there is.