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Zen and Budo Overlap by David M. Valadez

Deshi: You have said that Awareness is where Zen and Budo overlap. What does this mean?

Sensei: Zen and Budo overlap when it comes to observing our habitual ways of being. Habitual reactions are a lapse in awareness, which is a lapse in being in the present moment, which is a loss of the possibility of acting compassionately and wisely toward our fellow Man. In habit, we come to relate to the world solely through our ego - meaning we come to experience the world only through our own fears, our own pride, and our own ignorance. Our chances for cruelty and for misjudgment are very high in such a state. Zen and Budo address this matter by addressing the quality and duration of our awareness.

Deshi: The practice is more than merely saying to oneself, “Now I will seek to be aware, now I will end my habitual reactions to the world and to people in my life.” Isn’t this correct?

Sensei: Yes, while entering upon the Path is a cognitive decision, the cultivation of awareness is not merely a matter of making up one’s mind. Rather, awareness is cultivated through a practice that has this as its end.

Deshi: Can you give me an example of how this happens in our basic training?

Sensei: In the early stages of our practice, training involves three levels of addressing our habitual tendencies. There is the first level at which we remain unaware that we are habitual at all, but slowly we come to uncover the most gross examples of habitual reaction. An example of this is the common tendency to meet force with force – which is a habitual fear response born in insecurity and in anxiousness. There is the next level at which we come to uncover some of the more subtle habitual reactions though we remain ignorant of the other habitual practices we employ to disguise the former as non-habitual. An example of this is when we meet force with force but “spin” it under a banner of “being martial,” or of “being spontaneous,” or of “helping our partner understand.” Then there is the moment at which we both uncover the habitual and the habit of disguising the habitual as something other. Until we reach this third stage, what we decided or intend to do is not only beside the point, it is part of the habitual and/or our efforts to hide the habitual from ourselves. Until we reach this third stage, our attachments to fear, to pride, and to ignorance, will appear to us as "the justified," "the reasonable," "the only option we had," "the altruistic," "that which we are working on," and that which we use to explain ourselves to others.