



David M. Valadez
Senshin Center
Dojocho

Persevere

by David M. Valadez

When we commence our Aikido practice, we are learning more how to train than we are actually training. Of course, however, we should see these two things as one, as both making up a practice that is singular in nature. Back and forth, we will move upon a path that is bordered by training on one side and learning how to train on the other. Early training then is a time of wanderings. It is a time of countless first steps.

Mentally, early training is a time of turning our gaze inwardly. It is a time of coming to know our body. It is a time of understanding how we think and of how our thoughts come to affect every aspect of our reality, even our sense of self. Physically, early training is a time to forge the body anew. It is a time to come to terms with old injuries. It is a time to strengthen weak limbs. It is a time to stretch appendages long accepted as inflexible. Hence, early training is made up of many changes. Changes such as these may work to make us anxious. Anxiousness is normal. Be strong – persevere. Know that our ego may try to interpret every positive transformation as a failure long hidden. Know that we may, against our best intentions, work to divert energy into hiding these failures rather than working to reconcile them. We must try to see the various levels of incompetence and neglect that come to the surface not as failures, but as the very possibility of improvement and/or of refinement.

If our small self happens to warp every opportunity for positive transformation into “something we can do without,” be strong and train through these moments - persevere. If the small self tells us that we have trained enough this day or this week, that this or that class is “extra” training, that Aikido takes too much time, that Aikido costs too much, that Aikido takes too long to learn, that we are too old or too young to learn Aikido, that Aikido is not what we are looking for, etc., be strong and train through these moments - persevere. Understand that these types of resistance from the ego are very common to any inward or spiritual journey. Expect that our small self will work, almost tirelessly, to prevent us from finding the Path, from seeing the Path, from staying on the Path. Be strong and train through these moments - persevere.

We must welcome this internal resistance. It is a part of training. Try not to shut it down by force. Welcome it. Know that to resist against resistance is to defeat oneself. Open yourself up. Realize, if we allow our small self to gain victory over us, we will in the end halt training altogether, or have it stagnate. Instead, continue to train and to reflect inwardly. Seek to understand the source of this resistance: Fear? Pride? Ignorance?

When our ego is pushing against us, turn things around. Find new options. See new possibilities. Be brave and invite these internal struggles with the small self. To repeat, they are the very possibility of training, they are the markers of training. Use every faculty we have at your disposal to be creative in finding ways to address the ego when it chooses to resist our practice. Perhaps, at times, we will have to compromise. Other times we can create a harmony. At other times, we may need to practice renunciation. In the end, reconciliation will be our goal. Seek the sanctity of the mat to assist you. Gain the council of our senpai to aid you. Listen more closely to the lessons of our teachers, do all this in order to understand more accurately what we may be feeling or experiencing as we train. Be strong and practice more deeply – persevere.

Moreover, know that it has been said, “There never was a struggle or a battle which required greater valor than that in which a human being forgets or denies his small self.” Be brave. Be strong. Train. This is Aikido. This is what it means to persevere.