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We Are What We Do by David M. Valadez

Training involves us learning many things. Equally, it involves us putting ourselves in a place to learn many things. We may believe that lessons will come to us on their own, or we may believe that lessons will come to us because we are out of options to avoid them, but this is just not true. Only the lessons we seek will become our own. Moreover, we will never reach so "rock bottom" in life that we will begin to choose what is right over what is wrong by default. Mediocrity may come to us against our best intentions, but it will always nevertheless come to us by our own actions and by nothing else.

Of course, we are what we are - that we must always deal with, and perhaps we may even have to always accept that. That is to say, we cannot and should not "criminalize" ourselves in light of all that we have to do or in light of all that we have not done. That would be very much in disaccord with Budo training. Yet, while training is highly individualistic there are formulas that are fully open to sociological types of analysis. There are things that work, that are part of training, and there are things that don't work - that don't work because they are not part of training. Both of these things are universal and thus they apply to us all.

This should be obvious: The dojo has set things up, has provided each member with what has to be understood as the bare minimum of what is required for true training to take place. Time will not alter these things. These things will always be needed and these things will always be the bare minimum for training. These things are: an intimacy with one's teacher; opportunity to train daily; weapons training; forms training and analysis; spontaneous training; a proven method and means to address one's fear, pride, and ignorance; historical and philosophical references which provide context and orientation; comradeship among peers; and varied perspectives and means for spiritual training.

These things are not the end-all of training - they are the minimum of training, they are the beginning of training. If we are below them, then we are in a state of working up toward them. That is a good thing. That is a fine thing. If we are achieving them all, then we are fine as well. If, however, we begin to rate what is below minimum as "sufficient," or if we come to see the minimum as some kind of "excess," then we have lost touch with training as a whole.

Those who excel, those who achieve, those who progress, those who mature, are those that partake in these minimum requirements fully. Those that do not are those that for one reason or another will not (I dare not say "cannot") participate fully in these bare minimums. We are almost dealing here with a Law of

Nature: This is why we see such correlation between things like total mat time per week and staying up to date with provided reading materials; or between addressing one's fears on the mat and having an ever-growing relationship with one's teacher; or addressing one's body fully (e.g. conditioning, wellness, health) and the level of endurance carried forth by the heart/mind over the long haul that is training in Budo; etc.

In the end, nobody regresses, stagnates, excels or matures naturally - that is to say, "without work". We "fail" or we "achieve" because of what we do and/or do not do. Again - this is why I have never seen an aikidoka that reads everything sent out to them, attends training daily, has an intimate relationship with their teacher, trains in weapons, etc., and regresses in their practice. And - again - this is why I have never seen anyone mature who does not read the materials provided, does not attend training daily, does not have an intimate relationship with their teacher, does not train in weapons, etc.

Consistency is everything, but this refers not only to the capacity to do something repetitively. More importantly consistency refers to an integrity between one's hopes, aspirations, goals, achievements, etc., and one's actions. He or she who is consistent in their training is he or she that will move beyond even their (present) imagination. The rest of us will fall by the wayside eventually. This "Law of the Spirit" makes training easier - not harder. It makes training easier because we can see both what we are doing and what we are not doing and understand them fully in light of what is taking place and/or about to take place. The vice versa is also true. Thus, great clarity can come to us as we develop. We can then, over time, as we mature, come to invest ourselves fully as we accept whatever level of investment we are currently able to do. We are both free then to be what we are as we are empowered to do what is needed in order to become more than we are. Clarity is always a blessing for those brave enough to wield it. For the coward, clarity is always a curse.