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The Body Must Be Fit

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A masterful execution of technique, which is a type of achievement, is one that is not confined by the physicality of the human body. However, the mastery of technique, which is a type of process, comes to us only through the physical training of the human body. A masterful execution of technique can hardly be ours while we are in possession of a fragile physical form. We cannot come to the tactical apexes of non-resistance or of effortless-effort by the defaults we gain merely by donning our gi or by attending class. We must become qualified athletes. In our practice, we cannot be so weak of limb that we cannot consciously and purposefully choose the path of mastery; turning away from the path of mediocrity. We cannot be so physically unfit that frailty superimposes itself upon all of our technical executions. This is true whether we are employing Yang tactics or Yin tactics. For while Yin tactics are yielding, they are so without being collapsible. At the heart of the structural integrity of Yin tactics lays good form, but at the heart of that good form should lay a physically fit body. Thus, whether executing hard or soft tactics, Yang or Yin tactics, a physically fit body is mandatory. Masterful execution will not allow us to bypass this necessity.

This need is only compounded more when we speak of the process of mastery – the process of training toward mastery. The process of mastery is set between several contrasting and/or competing energies of Time – forces that pull upon our bodies in very concrete and opposite ways. These forces require that we be aerobically fit, physically strong, and flexible. When our body possesses aerobic fitness, physical strength, and flexibility, we can adequately confront both the conditioning and corroding forces that come to face us through our training as Time passes. What are these forces?

There is the matter of Time passing over our bodies in the form of endless repetition. This Time is productive and positive, on the one hand, as it leads to a capturing of detail and an overall strengthening of all elements involved. On the other hand, this Time is regressive and corrosive as repetition over long periods always leads to degenerating effects of one kind or another. This Time happens within another Time which itself comes to govern us beyond our best intentions: The aging process. This Time is also as productive as it is deleterious or negative. As Time passes, through repetition and through the maturation process that commonly accompanies aging, in many ways, our bodies become more capable. Yet, as Time passes, our bodies continue to diminish in terms of overall physical potential. In other words, the very means through which we come to embody mature form is also the very means by which we inhibit how much potential we hold toward the embodiment of masterful form. There is a “give-and-take” at work in the process of mastery.

There is only one element capable of neutralizing these contrasts, such that Time can find a balance with itself and for all likely purposes still be considered positive in nature. This element is the physically fit body. It is the body alone, the physically fit body, which tips such forces toward our advantage. Nothing can come close to the great role the physically fit body plays in enhancing the productive aspects of Time and slowing down and/or reducing the degenerating effects of Time. Toward this end, a body must be strong, flexible, and possess endurance. Behind these athletic attributes lies the capacity to acquire a skill quickly as well as the capacity to avert injury and to quicken healing times – things all vital to the process of mastery.

From a particular perspective, the above-average aikidoka must be an above-average athlete. While a few hours per week of physical training, or even one hour a day of physical training, may suffice for the average modern citizen trying to get off the couch, this amount of conditioning may still fall short of the amount of training carried out by the average athlete. Therefore, we must do more in our attempts to be above average. That is to say, solely participating in Aikido classes as a way of conditioning the body may not be enough. Training should be supplemented on a regular basis with various types of aerobic training, various types of resistance training, and various types of flexibility training, etc. While Aikido can be effective against a stronger adversary, Aikido training will never be for the weak of mind, the weak of spirit, or for the weak of body.