

There is no substitute for practice

As an instructor I am very used to questions regarding technique, posture, types of attack and all the other queries the inquisitive mind throws at me from time to time. I feel that I have managed pretty well, until recently that is.

After our regular mid week practice one of my newer students asked me about the philosophy of Aikido. I explained to the best of my knowledge regarding O' Sensei's' experiences and beliefs. However, to the student and in the end myself this seemed not enough.

The question remained with me for a number of days. Philosophy was something I have never really personally considered in Aikido. I have read all of the classic text and considered comments & guidance from Shidojin (re: Philip Smiths article - Aikido: Martial Art or Philosophical Pursuit). I feel I understand O' Senseis' overall view of the system he had created. But still I did not fully understand how to answer the question to a new student.

I then had the thought of putting the question (and others I have been asked) into another scenario. Having studied business to degree level, and having a number of years of commercial experience, I examined how I deal with everyday situations.

Let me show you how I came to my conclusion.

The status of Degree, be it in Aikido or academic achievement consists mainly of study. The only difference in my case between the two forms of study is that the academic form took on more consumption of alcohol, and being grilled for being a 'student'.

From studying a degree one would hope to acquire employment within a chosen or related field. In my case, a career in the extremely wide field of commerce. (Why didn't I take my career teachers advice and study archaeology)?

Once in work those academically qualified apply their knowledge. From here they learn new skills, but this time, not from books and case studies. This time it is from direct experience.

When studying for an Aikido qualification (be it 6th Kyu or Dan Grade) you study directly by practicing the Way through techniques, and sometimes from books, and more commonly today videos. You study and learn what to everyone is Aikido when they first join - A Martial Art, form of self-defense, etc. In my experience I have never met a student who began Aikido to learn a philosophy.

As you train and develop in both fields you place the books on the shelf to gather dust, as you are becoming adept to the job, or Aikido. You respond quicker and recognize the names making practice more enjoyable. In business you develop contacts, maybe study the markets and know when is a

good time to buy or sell, or how the latest legislation is going to effect your operation.

In both cases so far there has been no reference to philosophy.

However, if you feel proficient in your fields you may write a beginners guide to Aikido in a local magazine or paper, or publish a book on the One-Person Business Manager. You have now stated your beliefs. Believe me some people will disagree with you, and some will thankfully agree with you.

In both cases now , the way you interpret your knowledge is a personal examination of your experiences and knowledge. What warm up is best for your students. What type of advertising is most effective for a new business? You offer your own theories on subjects. The words highlighted: knowledge and theories are two key principles in philosophy. But isn't the example I have given been rather personal. After all someone has been writing from his or her own knowledge.

To me in my limited capacity to intellectualise I feel that you draw your own conclusions on Aikido's' philosophy. I also feel that the best way to achieve this is through practice, and not directly through text, reading or having them read to you. Through contact you will gain experience and gain knowledge and theories on techniques from your fellow students, instructor, Shidoi and visiting Shihan (Shidoi and Shihan being a wealth of experience). They all should help you develop your own ideas, but never force their own on you. After all we are all different. Just look at two Shihan we as an organization have had most contact with recently. Both Senseis' Tamura and Yamada studied at O' Senseis' feet, but their style and interpretation are completely different.

So where does this leave the philosophy? Looking at Aikido as a philosophy is like looking at one of those pictures you see from time to time of a plant pot, or is it two faces opposite each other - I don't know. And that is exactly what the philosophy of Aikido is to me. I don't know. One day I may be geared for a hard practice, other times a break at the end of a long day.

I feel that the only way to really get to grips with the philosophy - if that is your pilot - then practice is the key. Through practice you gain your own experience and manner in how to deal with what you are doing two, possibly three times per week. I have articles in some magazines of individuals placing their two cents on the subject of philosophy and Aikido. I profess not to know a great deal, and the day I profess to know everything is the day I will cease to practice.

To me Aikido is technique you practice every time you enter the dojo and the spirit you take with you when you leave. I feel that you can read as many books as you like, but there is no substitute for practice. Through practice you develop spirit, through this spirit comes enjoyment and knowledge. To meet people on the mat and in the Dojo of our own organisation offers us all a once in a life time opportunity to meet and enjoy each other company.

All I can say again is that try to avoid looking for the “meaning” of what you are doing and just enjoy your practice. Who knows, someone may agree with my ‘philosophy.’

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