

Benson Spivey

August, 21, 2008

San Dan paper

Development

On beginning to brainstorm about a topic for this paper, I remember the challenge of writing and developing a piece for my nidan exam. My usual way about me is to focus on a specific issue, work on it, and then come to some sort of realization, and then WHA-LA! There is growth. This growth is usually in the form of an evolution in my technique but also always transmits into my personal growth as well.

I can also say that it seems that the growth does not necessarily happen as an actual set experience with boundaries and completion, but seems to be more of a lasting process that gets richer and deeper as time (and of course, practice) moves on.

So back then, the nidan paper was on realizing that causing pain to your partner/attacker in technique can have the consequence of escalating confrontation and violence. That it can lead to a situation that can become more out of control.

It can be said that small yang attracts bigger yang, and the before mentioned is an example of that. This of course runs contrary to aikido ideals where neutralization is the goal.

Looking back, some junior to me were like “duh--- of course” So ok, it took me a while to realize that at a level beyond intellectualization. Ok.

I am proud to say though, that, that process has become richer and deeper and has now expanded into realizing that not only pain, but simply force, can cause resistance and hinder progress as well. I am finding that technique is easier applied by gently guiding the uke rather than simply putting them where you want to. That quality seems to beget effortless.

While that set of notion has expanded, a new focus for me is on connection. One unique feature of aikido which sets it apart from other martial arts is its emphasis and dependence on connection between partners. Though “connection” between sparring partners can be witnessed in other arts such as boxing, this is usually only seen between artists who have developed their skill to a high level. At times, one can see the “dance” between a boxer who is attacking through striking and the defender when blocking. They blend together into what appears to be perfect timing and smooth connection, but boxing, to be effective, is not dependant on this. As long as strong contact is made by the striker the opponent will be moved one way or the other.

For uke to be affected in Aikido though, nage must be fully aware of the connection that exists between the two. This connection needs to go beyond the simple acknowledgement of the tactile sensation of, for example a wrist grab, but to recognition of where a partner’s center is in relation to their own throughout the entirety of their combined movement.

Since an Aikidoist moves from his center and takes the opponent's center/balance, this consistent connection is crucial. As it is through this, that proper and effortless technique is born.

For example, when the two partners are in movement, on say, a wrist grab, if nage moves too fast uke will not be able to keep up. Connection will be broken and any technique will then be forced. This situation can lead to resistance and produce a less than desirable aiki outcome. If nage moves too slow (or slower than uke's attack/energy) then uke may overwhelm nage by being ahead of the movement in which nage is then trying to catch up to control.

This ties back to the idea of "force." If you are pulling someone in a direction, there can be resistance. If they are ahead of you then maybe you could use force to get back into control. Either way it is resistance and a form of disconnection which leads to ineffective technique or one that requires more than needed effort.

While this is an explanation of what can go on while training on the mat it is always important to acknowledge how this applies in one's relations in life. So to use the last example as an analogy:

In conversation if you are ahead of your partner they may become disinterested or frustrated and a disconnection happens and you may lose them. The inverse also holds true as well. If you are not keeping up with them then they can also lose interest or become frustrated. Disconnection happens there too. It becomes full of effort, not harmonious and not aiki.

So the last realization about connection is relatively new (the refined version anyway). Like my other realizations, I look forward to how that will evolve. With this type of practice, my techniques have less effort and my relationships are smoother. I have training to thank for that. Good partners, good teachers.

Peace