

Consistency Through Aikido  
Nidan Essay  
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I was originally drawn to aikido for many different reasons. One dominant reason for entering into aikido training was the mystery that lay behind the art as seen from the observer's perspective. There was mystery as to how what seemed to be simple movements could orchestrate magnificent power in moving people around. As I have approached the examination for Nidan, I have reflected upon the mystery that aikido once started out as for me. Upon further reflection, aikido has taught me much more than I can adequately describe in one concise essay. One principle that I have cherished from my time spent training in aikido is that of consistency.

Today, our world is full of busyness, diversions, distractions and what seems like an overwhelming array of unlimited choices, options and decisions. Our world is in a state whereby lack of focus and consistency can cause a person to feel lost or confused. Aikido has been a vehicle by which I have learned how to apply the principle of consistency to both my physical training and my life outside of the dojo in five key areas. Learning aikido has shown me how consistency is a crucial part of training, commitment, self development, people and life as a whole.

Aikido training is similar to that of any other exercise system such as aerobics, resistance training and sports. You only get better at those things that you do often. Lifting weights makes you stronger. Running enhances your cardiovascular health and stamina. Yet aikido training goes deeper. Physical training has strengthened all three aspects of my mind, body and spirit together. I marvel how the power of aikido training can interlace the mind, body and spirit together in a way that is not as strong as in other physical training methods.

Training on the mat has helped teach me about humility. There is nothing more powerful than approaching a moment or period of time feeling like I may be on the verge of "mastering" a certain technique and along comes someone who shows me a particular nuance of the technique that opens up a whole new world of thought and challenge to delve deeper into the meaning and execution of the technique. This is a tremendous feeling and reminder that all of life has opportunities for us to learn from each other and to continually refine and improve upon what we do.

From a point of humility comes the ability to let go of mental obstacles that hold us back physically in our training. I have found that this process is strongly connected to how fluid I am on the mat. When I hold onto thoughts of challenge, struggle and weakness during training, my ability to blend and flow is hampered. This sends a signal to let go and embrace a more calm, centered and open mindset. Once the mind opens, then my body responds as well with flowing movement which increases my level of training and results in satisfaction both during and after

training. Moments like this have often propelled me towards the next class, seminar and opportunity to be a consistent student and learner.

Consistency of training builds commitment and focus. In my early years as a white belt I was overwhelmed at the difficulty of learning aikido. Feelings of being overwhelmed at learning aikido were common. I remember those days and often understand why people over the years choose to quit training in aikido. In order to overcome the initial learning challenges and fears I developed the commitment to the principle of just getting to the next class. That became my focus and the commitment to this principle has allowed me to stay consistent in my aikido development throughout the various stages of life that I have travelled through.

Another consistent result I have received from studying aikido has been receiving the gift of personal development. Athletic competition fosters an attitude of being better than your opponent. Aikido goes against that philosophy and has shifted the philosophy for me to that of becoming better than I used to be. Each class, month, and year that goes by, I endeavour to train in a consistent fashion so that I look for ways to enhance the quality and depth of my training. The focus of becoming better than I used to be has infiltrated every area of my life. At work I try to become a better leader, co-worker and service provider. At home I seek to be a greater husband, family member and friend to those people whom I spend time with.

The subject of people is a huge part of aikido for me. I love the way aikido, like many other martial arts, eliminates the social class system, so that people from different stages and places of life can come together for the common purpose of training and learning. The people I have trained with for a long time are ranked among my closest friends. I am thankful for the opportunity to train and be friends with such an outstanding group of people. These people are uniquely consistent in their personal qualities of compassion and generosity.

A former student of our dojo who studied many other art forms once commented to me that, "the one thing you will not find in other martial arts is the quality of people as in aikido". I agree with him. As I have travelled around North America to different seminars and dojos, I have been amazed as to how the qualities I mentioned before are consistently found in foreign places. The people I have met abroad are an exceptional group of people who are ready to welcome you, teach and learn with you all in the aiki spirit. Strangers quickly become friends and I have found time and time again that the aikido community is really tightly connected and small.

The consistent currents of training, personal development, commitment and the people I have met through aikido have enriched my life immensely. Like other people, I have faced my own personal challenges and different stages of life. All through the high and low points and everyday points of life, aikido has always been a consistent option and choice which I am grateful for having. Aikido has been one of the few constants that have carried me through a variety of experiences.

I have often thought of aikido like a giant staircase of life. The mystery is there on how to get to the top. But consistency has taught me to climb one step at a time. Over the years I have

enjoyed pausing for a moment to look down and reflect upon the journey encountered to that point. Then I proceed to continue looking up and persevere going deeper into the uncharted territory that aikido offers.