

# "Deference"

Richard Moon

As a teacher and a student I am never really sure what correct behavior is. I suppose I simply followed along with what I thought everyone was doing and that is how I learned what I assumed was proper etiquette. But there are times when I watched students in their deference to instructors and instructors especially new instructors deal with the grandiosity that comes from being shown such deference and I wonder how conscious we are of the process and whether it might not be worth looking at our behavior and questioning it from time to time.

I would like to make a distinction between two kinds of deference. In one the deference is that of a student showing a teacher their willingness to learn. In another it is a submission of class from one of lower class to one of higher class.

In Aikido and many martial arts transferred from Asia, the Asian caste system of etiquette regarding deference is at play. We in the west imitate it without realizing that it is an unconscious carry over and not necessarily an important part of the study.

Deference to a teacher is a sign that it is OK for you to correct me. Deference is a sign that I am willing to receive the teachings, that correcting me would not be an intrusion and I would not receive it as condescending. It signals that I want you to correct me and share the knowledge that you have with me.

The deference a student shows a teacher is simply one of making it easy for the teacher to teach you. It is making one's self accessible, letting the teacher know that you are open to learning. A student's proper attitude is of both making oneself accessible to learning and an expression of gratitude for the teachings.

The dark side of deference is that it can enhance the inflation of an instructor's ego. The grandiosity that individuals can take on is a very delicate matter. The teacher must understand the vulnerability they have to grandiosity. We should also understand the cost of indulging it. The less conscious we are of this, the less we talk about it openly, the more likely we are to be influenced by it's a shadow. This is not to diminish the importance of the role of an instructor. It is simply an awareness, of an energy dynamic that is at play, when we enter the role of teacher and student.

The responsibility lies individually with the individuals involved. As students maybe we should think in terms of respect more than deference. Even though as students we have theoretically less power we are still 100 percent responsible for engaging with integrity. If we are not honest about what we see who will be?

By deference a student encourages a teacher's guidance. There is a thin line between where deference turns to either diminishing one's self or flattery. As O Sensei said, "even if it is slightly apart from the way

it is no longer the way.”

We must attend to our musubi. We must live true to our experience. That is our warrior’s challenge. It does not matter where we fit in the equation whether as teachers or students because we are all both. What matters is that we follow the path of awareness that leads to honesty and kill with a single strike that behavior which aggrandizes or diminishes anyone in the exchange of the knowledge of O Sensei's art.