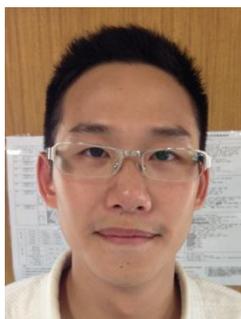


Learning How to Learn Aikido James Wong



“Extremely exhausted”, “overwhelmed with pain”, “gotten used to injuries”... are the phrases that I used to describe “uchideshi”, the apprenticeship program that I participated in Aikido Kobayashi Dojo from May to July, 2014.

Seriously, being an uchideshi was tough. Lack of rest, intensive trainings and disciplined behavior almost drove me crazy in the past 3 months. Sometimes when I got too tired, I asked myself why did I decide to join this program; do I really want to be a professional fighter? Do I want to open an Aikido Dojo? Or do I really hate myself so much that I have to find such a special way to torture myself like this? However, every time I asked myself have I ever regretted to join this program, my answer is always “No”, because this is definitely a very remarkable experience in my life and I really learned a lot throughout the program.

To me, the greatest achievement I have got from the uchideshi program is the experience of being a full-time budo (Japanese traditional martial art) participant. It gives me a better understanding of how to study Aikido continuously in a professional manner, as well as an appropriate learning attitude that applies to both Aikido and life-long behavior.

PRACTICE. We always say “practice makes perfect”. It definitely applies to Aikido training. If I have to modify this phrase more specifically for Aikido, I would say “practice makes basic”. Aikido is a martial art developed with a sophisticated philosophy. The concept is very abstract and all the techniques require consistent and corresponding movements of different parts of the body. It is impossible to explain every little detail verbally. However, by repeating the same techniques times and times, your body will get used to the movements and every part of the body will start corresponding accordingly.



OBSERVATION. As mentioned above, it is very difficult to explain every Aikido technique in details verbally. Even if the sensei (training instructor) explains, students would not be able to understand because their bodies have not gotten used to the movements yet. In this case, observation is very important. It is a must to observe the differences between your sensei’s and your own movements, so to improve the quality of the techniques. Catching a very little difference can be a huge improvement for yourself.



MODIFICATION. Every Aikido participant repeats the same technique over a thousand times to improve the movements and make it smoothly.

If you practice enough, your movements should be smooth and good enough to perform the technique in a presentable manner. However, the differences between experts and normal participants are always delicate. In order to improve the quality of the technique, Aikido participants should modify the details of the postures and movements from time to time.



ATTITUDE. It sounds pretty simple; practice, observe, then modify. However, the most interesting thing of Aikido is that this cycle never comes to an end. Participants have to keep practicing, observing and modifying endlessly, so to improve little by little throughout practices and modifications of details. Aikido participant should be dedicated to practice and be interested to discover the details. It is important to have a good sensei; it is important to have good partners... However, it is the most important to have an attitude to continue studying Aikido endlessly. That is what I would call the “spirit”, which is the appropriate learning attitude that we should have.

Frankly speaking, I did not end up to be an “expert” of Aikido after I went through these 3 months. However, I have come to realize the most important element to develop myself to be an “expert”, which is the spirit. It is difficult to keep up the interest and attitude while we are repeating the same things everyday with an exhausted body. However, if we take it really serious, we should know that it is a learning process to keep repeating, observing and modifying. And it does not only apply to Aikido; it applies to the other aspects in our life, too. After all, it is very grateful that I have a chance to understand all these by participating to the uchideshi program, and I have no regret at all.

