

This moment is all we have

There is a saying that goes something like - "You are only as good as your last....", in boxing "fight", in formula 1 "drive", in acting "movie" and in business "team" (I like this one!). In Aikido we might say that "you are only as good as your last Kihon". It might seem like a harsh statement with the implication that every step could be your last so you better be on your A-game each time every time, but I think the message is broader and more subtle than might be initially evident and arguably one we should live by.

I think it is fair to say that we all carry collateral from previous achievements through life and that we assume that we can live off that as a definition of who we are for ever more. I would contend though that is only a reflection of our past not our present or who or what we are today.

I was on a warm and relatively empty beach today, a wonderful dojo that is full of life, energy and an overall peace and tranquillity that allows one to jettison the baggage of one's busy life along with a freedom to allow thoughts to follow their own path. It's also a great place to practice Kihon dosa and kata as it has a unique ability to allow you to see the movement of your feet, weight distribution, consistency of moves and turning centres all through how the sand is moulded after each move. The best place to do this is right on the edge of the shore where the sea has recently lapped the sand and smoothed and compressed it into the perfect canvas to record ones moves.

I was practicing Kihon dosa #2 (Tai no henko ni) and after each move stepping to one side to analysis the results. Every so often I would step to one side and look back at the previous attempt and find that the sand had recorded a 'good' picture. Many poor or disappointing attempts would follow before a good one returned. Looking down the beach I could see the results in a long line of varying proficiency. The good ones made me happy, the others a little disappointed, and the process would continue. After a while a line that stretched into the distance of sand recordings showed the truth of my moves to any that care to take interest (only me to be honest!). So how should I measure myself? take the worst of the moves and baseline my skill at the lowest level? average out all and pick a capability somewhere in the middle ground? or take the best examples as a reflection of a higher level of achievement?

At that moment, with the warm damp sand under my feet and the sun low in the sky, I looked up from my last attempt to see a wave roll in and erase all of my previous attempts. Every good, average, and poor attempt was erased, deleted from existence. I felt a moment of loss, after all I had worked hard at performing those moves. But I needn't have as the one I was about to do was the only one that counted, and a record of the past would not add value to that one. I started again with the only Kihon dosa existing being the one that I was doing right in that moment, the thousand I did before and the thousand I would do in the future meant nothing. We are all gifted so many opportunities for a new now that to live off the collateral of the past is to waste the present.

In life we all too often live by the accomplishments of the past, I once passed a grading to get a Shodan black belt so I am 'worth' that forever more? I did a good deed last week, so I am a good person. I showed someone kindness recently so am I am kind person? I passed my driving test (some time ago) so I am good driver?

I would say the answer to all of these (and many more) is probably "no". Just the way the Kihon dosa recordings on the beach are only true at that moment in time, transient and gone before you know it. They all only exist at one moment in time, whatever you are doing now, how you are living now is what and who you are, no more, no less.

The actions of the past may be indicators of the future, but do not give you indefinite definition of who you are today or might be tomorrow. You may be able to live off the achievements of your past, but you will be living a lie if you assume that is who and what you are today, every moment is an opportunity for being a new you.

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