

The fountain in the desert

The underlying thought that prompts this piece is that I have been guilty in the past for thinking about others, and judging their technical Aikido, in a way that I now regret; but it takes time to see and much longer to admit it and change.

I will explain in a story form that came to me while on a journey back from an aikido seminar, you may have to search for the deeper meanings, it is intentional.

Long ago those who decided to travel across the desert did so without knowing if water could be found on their journey; they would take as much as they could, but never enough, or so the stories tell.

Those brave people, (some might say stupid), had a driving passion to go forward and find out if it was possible to travel the length of this vast enduring plain in hopes to cross and conquer it. They all had a plan, and I am sure there were many different ones, as there still are today, due to life's various paths being in the lap of the gods; sadly many paths are never completed.

The one thing in common was the hope of finding water on the way.

The early travellers risked much by their journey but in doing so gained knowledge of the location of the desert fountains, they shared their find and drew up maps for others to use. For many would be travellers this was the start of following in the footsteps of those who had shown the way.

For a moment let us look at what I see as my difficult time ahead.

In the year 2007 I have to make a decision of testing others who wish to see if their advancement has reached the next level. A large number of candidates like this year only comes rarely, and a lot of thought must go into giving a fair balance to each and every one and reward them or ask if they would walk some more in search of the missing fountain within them.

'Who knows the answer to this?' I ask my self. After pondering on this subject for some time, I have come to the conclusion that this is how I will view and make my final decision.

I have written this piece with all these points being in my mind.

Aikido means so much to me, as I'm sure it does with all those others that have decided to follow the art. We had all embarked on a simple journey, or so it seemed at the outset, but we soon realise that it is far from this.

For many the journey is far too hard to reach the other side and only the few will see the true benefit. Others stop on the way and may go on to other levels of searching or just give up and become perhaps sheep-like and walk without thinking where their own life could belong, but as long as life has it's material rewards then perhaps this life was all that they had hoped for.

The rest struggle and know that this opportunity was given to them, to find the purpose of why they are here and they know they must take this journey to the end of the desert.

The fountain in the desert was there for those who wanted to travel this way and enabled them to find replenishment just when they needed it most. Finally maps were drawn up and others did not need to worry because others had done the hard work for them. Did those fortunate enough to follow after the brave first ones, realise just what sacrifices had been made in their search for

knowledge; did those that follow realise how invaluable were the notes the first travellers left that make for a safe and successful crossing of the vast desert?

Now days everyone takes for granted that you just buy a map and take the easy road.

This may be a little harsh, as even the new explorers think that their journey is hard, even with the map. If only they were to listen; it would be much easier, they could save so much time and not look at worthless points and waste time like others had already experienced in the past and that held no value to the ultimate goal.

I have seen so many people that have given words of wisdom just to be looked upon as old fossils that could talk but did not show it with the body. The new explorers knew that they were far more smooth and looked much more advanced in their own preparations. Sadly they could only see through a small passage of what they thought was of value, and so they progressed with this the first thought that had come to them. To them the passage was clear and all they needed was lots of data from a chosen few. Were the few wise, or just good at showing clear form? A straight line is not always the quickest route. No? Think about it.

For many it just looked like a lot of sand before ones eyes, to others it was fascinating, and the curious ones just needed to see what was over the high waves of sand, as most believed that to see the other side of the wave or dune, one would hold the key to knowledge that some others had not attained, put off by the hard work and physical torture involved.

To some travellers the physical cost was not a punishment but a pleasure, as they thought the reward would be well worth the pain.

To the first few I bet the fountain was a life saver and surely once the maps were drawn, a few following may have said in passing how they thank those who found the fountain. Perhaps there were those who just drank from the fountain because it was there, perhaps their main thought was to get the journey over and to reach the ultimate goal and reap a reward of acknowledgement from others.

Going back to those who worked at finding the fountain in the first place perhaps they had realised that it was a wonderful journey and taking it had continued to give them many other rewards.

These rewards may be more important than finishing the journey; because to tell others of what not to do was more important than to see others make the same mistakes as they had done.

You may say; 'why do they still make mistakes if they found the fountain?' they may reply; 'if we had such knowledge at the start; we may have found it easier ourselves'.

As modern day passes, the heroes of today have the challenges, but they also have gifts you cannot buy, friends that have seen the pit falls and the easy paths to take but did not themselves, either through blindness or just not seeing the clear path that was always there.

The modern day hero takes the gifts; the warrior from the past takes the credit, but from who?

I believe the responsibility to attribute the credit falls on me, because as I look at each person I have to think what has this person done to pin point the details of the fountain, did they teach those who were in need?

If they have given to others freely and the gifts can be seen by all then should they be rewarded?

However If I think they have only done this journey for themselves, then perhaps they need to walk another desert to find their first real fountain and then we will see if they wish to tell others or not. This is the test for us all.

I personally have to look at all the angles of what is before me, I will see the ones that walked the path for much longer than most and are still here today. Why have they walked so long with out climbing to the heights of what others have been able to in a shorter time frame, what did they give as they walked longer than many others, do they deserve rewarding? Did what they give help others to surpass even them selves?

Will the decision help them to find the impetus to start the walk all over again and find another desert to look for the fountain of knowledge, in the vast inner fountains that we all still need to tap?

I would like to end this on a thought.

The fountain may not be as good as those who drink from it; but without it no one would survive the journey, therefore like bricks in a house we must all thank each other for being part of something that holds others together and makes their life a pleasurable experience.

By the time I had finished this piece I had realised, it is the same challenge not just for me but all the teachers that have to make the decision of giving awards to others and we all have to search our mind on what to look for in another.

In my opinion those who put in the extra training time months before such an event truly deserve the respect and rewards that the teachers can give.

It is not all about passing; but passing well and to be at ones best, this way if this is not the time for them to go forward at least they cannot look back and criticise themselves for not trying.

Saito Sensei when testing students around the world would ask this to the teachers who had put forward their students for him to grade.

1. Are they a good person?
2. Do they support the dojo?

He was not interested in how they would show the technical side because he knew that if they had been put forward they must be ready in the eyes of the teacher.

But if these two questions were not answered to his satisfaction he would want to know why they were not fulfilling 1 & 2

Sensei Tony Sargeant