

Learning Danzan Ryu: Process Versus Product

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I love learning. I admit it openly. It is probably the number one reason I study and practice Jujitsu. In that statement, I chose the words “study” and “practice” carefully. Both words connote an important point that I wish to convey in this article which is that learning never has to end. Understood this way, learning is a continual process. Learning Danzan Ryu is experiential. It is not something attained but something experienced. As students of the art, we investigate its principles and practice applying them. We research the concepts and examine the nuances. We test ideas, revise and and retest. By doing so, we can be continually learning.

This may not be the way everyone approaches the art, but my sensei taught me to address my training with that focus. His website says it this way: “Leave no stone unturned, no question unanswered, never settle and always remain humble!” (<http://www.profhudson.com>). If we are motivated to follow this advice, how can we apply this focus to our training?

Many of us struggle along the way. At first we may think that learning is a linear process and that the more time we put into it, the more skill we will attain. Of course, we find that is not the way it works. Sometimes we learn quickly and that may be because of the nature of the material or where we are in our progress. Sometimes learning is challenging, often painfully so. We can become frustrated and disillusioned. However, if we are patient and persevere we often find that some epiphany lies on the other side of that uncomfortable zone.

But if learning is difficult, why do we do it? What is the end point? Is there a product or goal that we will attain? Zen describes the arts as vehicles toward enlightenment. Prof Okazaki talks about the completion of character. But is that really something that we can attain? What does it look like? And most importantly, is it something we would want?

There are many cliches about the journey being more important than the destination but in our case I think it is key for anyone who wants to continue their training beyond a certain point. Prof Ball once asked a group of blackbelts to reflect on our motivations for our continued training and to consider what prompted us to step on the mat and why we continue training.

For me, it is the process that compels me to keep training. The product is not as important. Process over product. We can examine every aspect of our art using this model. Ogoshi is an excellent example. If my goal is to throw uke on the ground then I am focused on a product. I can know I am successful if what I do results in uke on the ground. The process is not as important in that case since all I need to achieve my goal is for the uke to be on the ground. This may be sufficient if that is the goal. In self defense it certainly is all that you need. In sport too, it may suffice to throw uke on the ground more often than getting thrown by them. A police officer needs to arrest their suspect so there is a clear goal in that situation. Of course there are parameters that must be followed and rules to abide by, but in general the focus in these examples is on the product over the process.

What happens when the process takes precedent over the product? This is where it gets interesting - at least to me. Principles become the focus. Things like softness, efficiency and grace are primary and final results secondary. How we do something becomes as important if not more so than what happens as a result. And if we can let go of the product entirely then we can be free to study and practice the process. Maybe the result will suffer in the beginning, but if that is not the focus then it is not important. And from that we can improve our art and ourselves. Detach from the what and focus on the how. Be a student. Be a scientist. Study and explore how you are doing things versus fast-forwarding to check on the result. Let the result be the outcome of the proper process.

I have more questions than answers and that is okay with me. It means I have more to learn and more opportunities to grow. There is no end for me.

Dive deep into our art. My hope is that none of you find the bottom.

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