

Am I who I want to be in the world?
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There are times in our lives when everything falls apart, our worlds collapse or collide, and everything we thought we knew is not.

A friend once told me, "We as a people are not defined in life by what happens to us. We are defined by how we deal with it. More specifically, who we become through out the process." - Grant Korgan

So who will I become though my process?

I recall sitting on the porch with Linda Holiday Sensei, as she asked me how I make hosting an aikido seminar seem effortless. My response was my typical mix of half-truth with humor: "I am like a duck--I glide along serenely on the surface, all the while paddling like hell under water." That is what I was doing. My world was collapsing and I was paddling like hell and it wasn't working.

I had tripped and cut my knee open during a heated interaction with my 5 year old. Luckily he was unharmed. I couldn't train during the retreat my dojo was hosting. I sat there beating myself up for my poor parenting, for having to sit on the sidelines while all my friends were laughing and enjoying the amazing teaching and training. The more I beat myself up, the worse my pain and condition spread through my body. I was sitting on the precipice of the downward spiral. I opened my arms and surrendered to the darkness. With a number of negative interactions in my life, two dead dogs and a few other traumatic experiences, I couldn't take any more I had to stop the madness of my life. I remember waking on a cold winter morning and saying to myself, "I have to get off the line. Who I am is no longer working in my world."

It was time to face myself and who I had become. I spent 6 months processing and sorting my being. This was my opportunity to consciously throw out what I didn't like and put energy toward who I wanted to be. I emerged with the bears in the spring, to the light and the absolute beauty of Aikido. Now it is time to re-introduce ME to the world.

I walk onto the mat, my heart pounding thru my chest, closely following one of my mentors, Kimberly Richardson Sensei, with whom I'd been invited to co-teach an Aikido class. My head is playing its old recording: "You have nothing to share with these people. Most of them have done aikido longer than you've been alive." We bow in; I teach first, telling myself, "Don't panic". I see my metaphorical armor taunting me from the sidelines. In this moment I can choose my old self of protection or my new self of authentic whole heartedness. No one escapes this painful moment of reckoning. Will I walk my talk or will I retreat back to the darkness?

I stop and for a brief moment, I simply am. I am on the mat fully exposed; rather than shrink and apologize, I am present with my fellow Aikidoka. I decide to share what I've been working on in my life on and off the mat: "Vulnerability." Not exactly a common class topic. I could hear a pin drop.

The class shared a raw practice focusing on where we are the most vulnerable in our aikido technique. We dove right into the eye of the storm, middle of the attack and embraced the space of vulnerability. No one died, we all laughed and enjoyed playing with not having to be perfectly armored. This brought me hope and spurred me on in my quest for being REAL because it is so much more interesting than being perfect.

This opportunity to share with peers and sempai my path of being vulnerable enhanced and enlarged my being. Being open to talking about all aspects of vulnerability--physical, mental, emotional and psychological--has changed my focus. I have been in the question of how do I bring Aikido off the mat and into my daily life. This opportunity of opening up has made me realize it isn't bringing one world into the other. Instead it is about creating a new path allowing aikido and life to come together: sharing a process of integration.

Being vulnerable in my life on and off the mat allows me the room to be present and in connection with my partner. I am able to allow space for our Aikido to develop. I join our movements together whether I am Uke or Nage. I have moments of regression, I am human after all, and times when I interject my agenda into the technique and we bump into each other or things get all roughed up. Now I see the rough spots as an opportunity to pause, re-center and connect with the person on the other end of the arm, knife, sword or staff. When everything is going smoothly I am able to embrace my partner metaphorically. We are in relationship and we are working together to create a beautiful connection.

The path of least resistance has become more concrete to me in the past 5 years. At first I fought it and then I noticed it, followed by recognizing when I was in resistance. Now I have the option to step to the side of the resistance and entertain the possibility of taking a different path. This process has been a transformative lesson for me and has given me the opportunity to be a more compassionate parent. I grant our relationship the patience to listen and hear what his needs are regardless of his behavior, without feeling out of control or needing to control him. Through these lessons I am a more dynamic Aikido teacher and training partner.

In my practice of choosing being vulnerable over being 'perfect,' I have found room to play and try on different parts of myself to see what fits with where I am in life. Allowing and accepting the 'ebb and flow' of change allows me to be okay with my failure or success without attaching judgment. It simply is. I simply am.

My old recording of "Don't be vulnerable, you will be annihilated" is a distant memory. Thanks to support, patience and forgiveness of my tribe, I am able to emerge into the world as a whole REAL being in process and connection with my community. To love with my whole heart. To be open enough to be seen, to see and to believe I am enough.

It is said that it takes a village to raise a child. I believe it takes a supportive tribe for a person to change. I am grateful for Aikido, Brene Brown's research on shame and vulnerability and my relationships with my son, teachers, family and friends who have supported and encouraged me on my path. Gambatte!