

Ascending Descend

By: Clint Merchant (Blue Belt)

On the night of December 6, 2014 I was overtaken with a great amount of honor and humility when I was awarded the Student of the Year award by my Sensei. I've watched over the years as various students had received this award and have always felt a genuine happiness for them and looked up to them as a model of how an exemplary student should be portrayed. Never did I imagine that I would be receiving this award one day, that I too would have my award placed on the same wall as those students that I had admired in the past. It's truly a great honor to be among so many students whose hard work and efforts were recognized with this award. Shortly after receiving the award I was asked to provide a paper concerning my journey, my character, or anything describing the road to this point. I gladly accepted the challenge of putting together this paper because I enjoy putting my thoughts into words and I take my words very seriously; once they are out there they can't be taken back and sometimes no opportunities to explain.

Since being presented with the award, I find myself wondering from time to time what it was that Sensei had seen in me that made him decide that I should be the next Student of the Year. As I ponder this question, I generally come to the same conclusion...whatever it was...I can't allow myself to dwell on it...time to move on. Whatever it was that Sensei had seen in me in 2014 will be the same he will see in me next year and the many years after that. Within the past year I have made Karate training more than just (2) days a week; it's become more than just showing up to class and going home and leaving all the material learned at the Dojo. I've made Karate a consistent train of thought, inside and outside the Dojo, constantly considering katas; fast, slow, fast and slow, forwards, backwards, strong, soft. I put all this with the determination of giving back to Sensei all that he has poured into me in order to give 100% effort...all of this is what I carried with me the past year and will continue to carry with me in the years to come.

I started my Karate journey on February 4, 2013 and was quite unsure of what to expect. Even though my family had been a part of The Karate Dojo for numerous years, I was still hesitant of my abilities and my mentality towards Karate. I was scared that I wouldn't be able to get past my own shyness and insecurities; I was scared that I would somehow resemble a one winged eagle trying to swim when I did any katas; I was scared I wouldn't have the right mindset for it. I quickly learned that once I got into it, I didn't think about any of that stuff, I just did. Through my journey thus far I have learned many lessons from Sensei that I will take with me and incorporate into my life...two of which speak volumes to me come at the expense of two overly used quotes or clichés.

The Karate Dojo: "Give Out Before You Give Up"

I hear a lot of people coin the phrase “No pain, no gain” and one day it just stuck in my head and sat there for me to piece apart and come up with something more meaningful than just those words. Some just take those four words and run with it and work their bodies to the point of hurting and consider that a gain. When you actually think about the process, it makes more sense that there is a bigger picture at play here. When I first started Karate, the muscles I rarely used would become so sore and stiff...this is the break down period in which the muscle is tore down and stripped to its core...it is only then that the muscle can rebuild from this point to become stronger. Sensei realizes that this process is not only for the physical body but also for the being. I’ve taken the time and seen how Sensei is able to see that sometimes the weak muscle is ourselves and that sometimes the building point has to be at our lowest point...it is only there that we can grow to be stronger. Sometimes we need to be stripped to our core emotionally and mentally, not just physically, in order for us to become a stronger student. It’s a beautiful thing to see someone rise from the ashes of their former self and evolve into something great because of Sensei’s process.

The other quote or cliché that I consider on this road so far is “There is no victory without sacrifice”. It was during a movie that I heard this line and I started to think about how those words need to really be taken to heart. You cannot have victory over yourself until you are willing to sacrifice your old self. I cannot master myself if all I do is give up the small things and still keep the core self that is detrimental to my growth. In order to open up into the new and improved I realized that I have to say good-bye to the old and stale...I needed to sacrifice the old person that I used to be so that I may grow into something better. The sacrifice has to be great in order for great gains to be made. Sensei has been key in helping shed that old, shy and insecure person and help me become more solid and confident.

Throughout my journey it has been this kind of mindset that has helped me to push through my limits and reach for something bigger and better every time I walk into the Dojo. I’ve learned that sometimes in order to go up we need to first go down, that sometimes the direction we fear is the direction we should embrace, downward doesn’t always have to mean backwards when you have the right mentality, sometimes you need to descend in order to ascend. I’ve learned to trust my Sensei...he knows what he is doing and he knows the process in order to make me stronger.

Thank you for this award and I hope that the only changes that will be noticed will be for the better. Thank you for seeing in me what I can’t see in myself. Thank you for the journey so far...it has been amazing and I look forward to the future.